WAR
on
TWO FRONTS

To Dear Shiv
with best wishes & love
Bhagwan singh.
12/5/90

BY

Lt. Col. BHAGWAN SINGH

FOREWORD BY

General J. N. CHAUDHURI

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FOREWORD

The memoirs of a soldier who has commanded troops in action, must always be of interest to the new generation. This is particulary so when great changes have occurred while this new generation was growing up, changes which included independence for a nation and a conseqnent change in outlook. To the older reader it must also be of interest for up till now few Indians knew anything about their army, the gallant jawans and that small band of pioneers who officered these units through some very troubled times. Lt. Col. BHAGWAN SINGH was one such pioneer who had a particularly difficult task which he describes so objectively and without any personal rancour in his book. It was this objective approach combined with a firm sense of duty towards his men which enabled the author to suceeed so quickly.

I first met Lt. Col. BHAGWAN SINGH and the unit he commanded in GEDAREF just after their arrival. I was the first Indian staff officer in the famous 5th Indian Division and clearly remember the differences which were brought to my General. Fortunately for us all, General HEATH was a gem of a man whom I myself had served as an ADC in INDIA and who, perhaps because of this, had taken on my brother in the same capacity when we came overseas. He soon sorted out the matter and the author instead of being returned to INDIA under a cloud, went on to command his unit successfully through the war. Both the Commanding Officer and his men acquitted themselves with credit in whatever they were called upon to do.

To change the sword for the pen or the mountain gun for the typewriter is a bold transition but in war the author never shirked a difficult task and once again he feels it is his duty to bring the story of his gallant band to a wider audience. This straightforward tale may not abound in literary graces or affectations. It tells the simple story of a straightforward man and herein lies its charm. I hope the author has as much success with it as he had with his battery.

(Sd.) J. N. CHAUDHURI
General
Chief of the Army Staff

To the Brave Men of the Unit
Who Laid Down their Lives
For the Good Name of their
Unit and the Country.

Most of all I am grateful to His Highness the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir (Maharaja Sir Hari Singhji G.C.S.I., G.C.I.E., G.C.V.O., L.L.D.) for the great encouragement I received from him in the form of accelerated promotion and the grant of a hereditary Jagir of Rs. 3,600 per annum in recognition of my "outstanding and meritorious services" as he was pleased to call them.

The first so-called popular Government of the State, headed by Sheikh Mohd. Abdullah, however, lost no time in resuming this Jagir on assuming power.

To the readers I have an apology to make. These memoirs have been written about fourteen to twenty years after the occurence of the events contained therein, and as such some small details, names of places and in some cases the sequence in which minor events took place, was bound to slip my memory. I have therefore omitted details and names of which I was not so sure. Any lapse thus caused has to be overlooked. No record of any kind was available for reference purposes except copies of certain letters, as the Battery was transferred to the Indian Army complete with record during the war and never returned to the State. Whatever the book contains is thus almost entirely from memory. My earlier attempts at writing these memoirs were foiled by my re-employment, first in the Army and then as Private Secretary to His Highness the Maharaja of Jammu & Kashmir.

B.S.

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Chapter I

THE WAR BREAKS OUT

When war broke out in September 1939 I was commanding the Second Jammu and Kashmir Mountain Battery, then in camp at the Batmaloo grounds in Srinagar. The first Jammu and Kashmir Mountain Battery then happened to be earmarked for war and was normally to proceed on active service in case of need. That Battery had already taken part in World War I, so I thought the Second Battery should get a chance this time. The Chief of the Staff of the Jammu and Kashmir State Forces, Brigadier (later-Major General) H.L. Scott was on leave in England, so I met the Deputy Chief of the Staff Colonel Krichley and Brigadier Rahmatullah Khan and requested them to arrange to detail the Second Battery to proceed on active service instead of the first. They both said that the decision rested with the Chief of the Staff, who was hurriedly returning from England, but that I should keep my unit ready in all respects. It was, however, the unit officially earmarked for war, in rotation for the time being, that received complete and up-to-date equipment required for the field service and not the others, and until that was done the unit could not be kept perfectly ready. The Chief of the staff's arrival was to be awaited in any case. Things, however, moved quickly and the First J&K Mountain Battery which was already earmarked, started getting ready at Jammu, All their deficiencies, in men and animals, were to be completed by the second J&K Mountain Battery.

We were ordered to move down to Jammu immediately. On our way to Jammu, between Batote and Kud, I found Brigadier Scott proceeding to Srinagar. I expressed to him my desire to take my Battery to war this time, but he did not think it was possible to drop a unit, already earmarked, at that stage. He however, said that it was going to be a long and a great war and the Second Battery might get a chance later on.

On reaching Jammu we found a lot of activity in the First Battery. Two British Officers, a Major and a Captain, had arrived and a Lieutenant was to join later. These were the Special Service Officers (S S Os) who were to act as advisers to the commanding Officer and other officers. These officers pushed the officers of the Battery to the background and practically took control of everything in the name of advice. My enthusiasm died down, as I could never

tolerate any interference in the performance of my duties and fulfilment of my responsibilities as a Commanding Officer. The very thought of having advisers gave me a feeling of inferiority. When the Units of the Indian Army could do without any advisers why could not the States Forces Units ? Was it because all the Indian Army Units were already commanded by British Officers and the States forces by Indians ?

The appointment of British S S Os with the States Forces units showed that either the States Forces Officers were incapable or untrustworthy. In both these cases the States Forces Officers had no business to be there. They should have been altogether replaced by British Officers, but this was not done, probably to enable the British SSOs to attribute the unit's failures to the State Forces officers and successes to themselves.

To acquaint myself with what exactly were the duties and responsibilities of these SSOs. I got hold of the concerned regulations and instructions issued from time to time to found that these were either not described at all or when described were in such an ambiguous language that nothing could be made out of it, The commanding Officers could interpret them to mean that he would be a full-fledged C O with the SSOs up his sleeves to advise him in case he needed their advice, while the SSOs could easily interpret them to mean that they could impose their advice on the C O, who was to act on it without reasoning.

This interpretation of the SSOs had worked in the World War I and was working in the World War II. The difficulty could arise only if any C O objected to it, which possibility they had safeguarded against by laying down one thing in very unambiguous terms that the senior S S O could under certain circumstances (which were not difficult for him to create) remove the C O from Command for inefficiency and take the command himself. This reduced the position of the C O to that of a mere dummy, which I was in no mood to accept. I thanked my stars for the failure of my efforts to take my Battery to war, as I was thereby saved from being put in this embarrassing position. Fate, however, had its own plans for me

The Officer Commanding of the First J&K Mountain Battery took full advantage of the presence of the S S Os in the unit and of their position and authority. Not only were the deficiencies in men and animals of the First Battery completed by transfers from the Second, but some quite good animals and men of the First were also replaced by better ones from the Second under orders previously obtained from the Chief of the Staff. All deficiencies, before leaving the State, had to be completed at the cost of the State and thereafter at the cost of the Government of India. The SSO, therefore, saw to it that no replacements became necessary,

after the unit left the State, for quite a long time. Replacement of deficiencies in personnel, however, always remained a responsibility of the State.

On receipt of further orders the First Battery left by a special train for Secundrabad to join the 5th Indian Division with which they were to proceed to the Middle East, a fact which at the time was a dead secret. Before their departure they were entertained by the Second Battery at the Jammu Cantt. Railway Station to a sumptuous lunch. When I bade him good bye Major Colhon, the Senior SSO, smilingly said to me, "You know the Second always follows the First." In fact, the Second Battery was now a depleted unit, still responsible for replacing the deficiencies of the First in personnel and completing its own from the J&K Artillery Depot, and therefore hardly fit for proceeding on active service.

The First Battery had been in Secundrabad for hardly about six months, when the Chief of the Staff met me at a party in the Brigade Club Jammu. He took me aside and said 'Do you know that you have been transferred to the First ?' I replied in the negative. 'Well His Highness has sanctioned your transfer to the First,' he said and asked 'are you happy ?' 'I am happy' I replied, 'but' :—'But what, your family? we will look after them' he said.

'I never worry about my family on such occassions, sir, I have a different worry.'

'Well what is your worry' he asked.

'The S S Os' I said.

'What about the S S Os ?' he asked.

'I do not know what they are there for. If the C Os did what they should there was nothing left for the S S Os to do'.

'You will command the Battery and they will act as your advisers' he said.

'I have seen what that means sir' I said.

'But things would be different with you than what they were with your predecessor' he said.

'This is how you feel, sir, they might feel otherwise' I said.

The next day the Chief of the Staff invited me to tea at his house where Miss Scott (later Mrs. Bromhead) presented me with a red flower, saying 'This brings luck and success.'

The Military Adviser Artillery Indian Forces Major (later Lieut-Colonel) F.W. Cooper paid us a visit. When he met me he said 'I hear you have been transferred to the First'. I said 'Yes' and then told him what I thought about the SSOs. He said there would be no difficulty, and promised to write to the Senior SSO about it.

I must add that I had a great regard for British Officers as I ow some of them a good deal of my limited knowledge. But I hated the as SSOs. I had seen the SSOs once before in Gilgit when I was a sub altern with the Third J&K Mountain Battery. Once at Bunji I wa giving a demonstration of Artillery shooting on the miniature rang to Infantry Officers, when our SSO, also a subaltern (Lt. J. Barro shouted to correct what he thought was my mistake I dropped m pointer on the ground, asked the SSO to take charge of th demonstration, and took my seat. He did not expect this from State Officer and was very surprised, but he immediately expresse his regret and requested me to carry on, which I did. Thus th very idea of having SSO with me, made me uneasy.

Our General Staff Officer Col. Baldev Singh Pathania, an Commander Jammu Brigade, Brigadier Ghansara Singh, had aske me to see them before leaving for Secundrabad. When I went t see them, they both gave me a bit of useful advice as to how on should work in war. I promised to do my best, but expressed m inability to pull on with the SSOs. I also told them that I wa going to see to it that, unlike in World War II, if our officers were found fit for gallantary awards they got those meant for British officers such as D.S.O., M.C., and not those meant for Junio Commissioned Officers and other ranks such as I.O.M. and I.D.S.M. They both advised me not to worry about such matters.

I visited my village for a couple of days to meet my parents wife and children, and then left for Secundrabad. Both the SSOs Major Morley who had taken over from Major Colhon and Captain Corbett, and all the officers of the Battery had come to receive me at the Railway Station.

We went to the Officers mess, where after breakfast Majo Morley took me aside and asked me what worries I had regarding the SSOs. I asked him how he knew I had any, and he told me that he had received letters from Brigadier Scott and Major Cooper. I then told him what worries I had and he said 'you need not have any worries. You are the Commander and I am a mere adviser to you. There is no reason why we should not be able to pull on well, as our aim is common.' He offered me a room in the SSOs bungalow but I preferred to stay in the State Officers Bungalow where my predecessor was living. We then went to the office where I took over from Lt. Col. Sherbaz Khan.

Chapter II

THE FRICTION STARTS

Things in the Battery were much worse than I had imagined. Almost everything was done by the SSOs, and the officers of the Battery had very little hand in its training and administration. The Commanding Officer's position was not much better than that of a Subedar Major. The daily mail was received by the Senior SSO, opened by him, and then passed on to the office with necessary instructions. All replies were prepared either by the SSO himself or under his instructions, but signed by the C.O. The C.O's room was occupied by the SSO and the CO had his table in another room.

When I found no mail on my table on my first day in office, I asked for it and was told that it was placed at the SSO's table under his orders. On orders from me it was brought immediately to me, and was daily placed on my table thereafter. I started opening the letters, when my second-in-command Captain (later Lt. Col.) Amar Nath Lakhanpal pointed out to me that secret letters were not to be touched by anyone except the SSO. I opened the secret letters first. The Senior SSO in the meantime arrived in search of the mail. He saluted me and asked if there were any secret letters in the mail, I told him there were two. He said that as a CO, I would have a lot of other things to do, so it was a good thing if I left him to deal with the secret letters, if not the whole mail, and added that even otherwise it was the responsibility of the SSO.

'The more the work I have to do the happier I am' I said, and hinted that I hoped to fulfil all the responsibilities of a CO myself so that soon there would be very little left for the SSOs to do. I don't know how he felt about it but he at once said 'You can deal with the secret letters, but if you don't mind give those letters to me for registration and safe custody, as I have got a confidential box for the purpose'.

I did not like the idea but left it to be tackled in due course. I continued to open the secret letters, took whatever action was necessary, and handed them over to the SSO while going for lunch. This went on for about a month. One day when I took these letters to him it was a little over 1-30 p.m., and he had got up

from his chair and was about to move out. He felt annoyed and said 'I wish you could bring them earlier.' That gave me the opportunity I was waiting for. I told him I could bring those letters to him only when I rose for lunch after my days work, and that I was not going to bother him any more. I asked him to hand over the confidential box and key to me, otherwise I said I would purchase another. He very much repented and tried to persuade me to continue the procedure, but I did not agree. He then promised to hand over the box and key next month, which he did.

One day a weekly training programme of the Battery was placed before me for my signature. I refused to sign it as it was prepared by the SSO. When the SSO came to know he came to me and said that he was supposed to be responsible for the training of the Battery, therefore he prepared the Programmes.

'That is why you and not I should sign them' I said, 'Let the authorities have the correct picture so that if anything goes wrong with the training of the Battery you and not I become answerable'. The SSO started thinking, then asked me to sign the programme and promised to consult me in future.

Next week he brought a rough training programme to me, and said that he had prepared it for me. He asked me to make any additions and alterations I liked, but I insisted on preparing the programme myself to which he reluctantly agreed. From then onwards the training programmes were prepared by me.

Next came the monthly intelligence summary and the war diary. These were important documents, copies whereof went to the highest level, including the War Office London. The SSO maintained that to prepare and forward these two documents was unquestionably his responsibility, while I held that an adviser could never have any direct responsibility. At the most he could advise the Commander if the latter was unable to undertake the task himself. The SSO did not yield in this matter and insisted on sending these documents under his own signature, which in fact he had already been doing. But for me it was not a question of signatures, there was a principle involved in it. As a result, both of us prepared those documents separately and forwarded them to all concerned. The issue was settled but, as usual, in ambiguous terms. After some time the SSO received a confidential letter saying that in future the CO would prepare and forward these documents, duly advised by the SSO. The SSO was not very pleased with this letter. He showed it to me and said 'I do not know what they want me to advise. In future you alone send these documents. I have no advice to offer.'

Once in a mess meeting the Mess Secretary proposed that we

should have a portable radio set for use in war. Major Morely objected to it, but I put it to vote and all officers of the Battery voted in favour. Finding himself in a minority Major Morley too raised his hand. I very much appreciated this spirit.

Whenever Indian food was cooked in our mess, Captain Carbett, who was born and brought up in India, did not mind but Major Morley had his food cooked separately. He said the Indian food did not suit him. I said that officers in Indian units should get used to Indian food as on many occasion in war they might have to fall back upon food from men's kitchen. He agreed and started taking Indian dishes.

Having thus got internal control over the training and the administration of the unit, I started feeling some-what like a CO. The officers and other ranks of the Battery, who had only heard about me before, had now seen a little of me and I think they had started feeling some-what proud of me although I had not yet been able to devote much attention to them.

The SSOs attended the parade and office daily, but not in their former capacity. Major Morley, the Senior SSO, was in the habit of losing his temper Once we were both going round the unit on parade, when he hit a gunner with a stick. I quietly told him it was not a good thing to do. He apologised and promised not to do it again.

We were once conducting a miniature range practice when somebody ordered a single range while ranging with a section. Major Morely called it wrong, but I explained to him that that was the latest teaching of the Indian School of Artillery. He rediculed the suggestion, but later saw me in my office and apologised. The second SSO Captain Carbett, who was a young officer and in touch with the latest training had told him that I was right.

The SSOs were trying to adjust themselves to the new position, though minor conflicts did occur between us off and on. I must say the SSOs behaved extremely well and underwent the change without outward resentment. This goes to show that there was nothing very much wrong with the SSOs. It was the policy of appointing them as such that was wrong.

My predesessor, on his return to the State, had taken over as commandant J&K Artillery Training Centre. He had some favourites in the First Battery whom he wanted to keep with him. He obtained orders from the Chief of the Staff for their transfer to his unit. I was not consulted, so I naturally, resented the action. When my predecessor was commanding the First Battery he had selected personnel transferred to his Battery, which was justified to some extent as the Battery was proceeding on active service. But now he was trying to reverse the procedure, for which there was no justifi-

cation at all. When the SSO learnt about it he said he would go to the GOC and have the transfers cancelled, but I said I would have them cancelled myself. I wrote to the Chief of the Staff, who cancelled his orders but wrote back to express his displeasure at my asking for cancellation. Here is what he wrote:—

Srinagar,
7th June 1940.

My dear Bhagwan Singh,

Your letter of the 1st.

I have already cancelled the request for your NCO's. They were wanted to help to train reinforcements for your Battery. Also no well run show should tolerate indispensible men, or rather think any man indispensible, for no man is so. Also indispensable men become casualties like others.

I am glad you persuaded the SSO not to go to the District Commander. Had he done so, and had the G.O.C. interfered (probably he would have refused to do so) a very ticklish question would have been raised. I would not have accepted such interference tamely.

The HQ J&K Mtn. Artillery Regiment has been abolished, with the post of Commandant and Adjutant. After a set back I now hope to be allowed completely to reorganise the A.T.C. and to make it a very good show.

There is no other particular news.

With best wishes,

Yours sincerely,
H. L. Scott.

One thing now exercised my mind, and that was how were we going to function in war. If I and the other officers were to do what we should, the SSOs would have nothing to do. That actually was what I wanted, but for the authorities to allow that would have amounted to a confession that the SSOs could easily be dispensed with, which was contrary to the higher policy. I, on my part, was bent upon pulling my own weight without letting anybody interfere in my affairs.

The formation with which we were going to work in war was going out for a tactical exercise. We received a copy of the operation orders. I had a talk with the SSO as to how we were going to function. On this depended our future relations. The SSO thought that he would act as a link between the commanders of higher formations and the Battery, but I maintained that no such link was necessary. I could and should have direct contacts with the commanders and the staff of the formations concerned like other COs. The SSO should either not be there at all, or if he

must be present he should confine himself to the advisory capacity already reserved for him. We failed to agree on this point, and the SSO probably referred the matter to the BRA (Brigadier Strawbenzie).

One day the BRA arrived for inspection. He went round the unit on parade and then went to the office with the SSO and myself, had the doors shut, and then talked to us. The talk was mainly directed to me. He said that in my predecessor's time no quarrel ever arose between the CO and the SSO. They both worked in full co-operation. Active service demanded the highest degree of co-operation from all, so questions like, who should do what, should not arise. When I gave him my point of view the SSO agreed that he had been overstepping a bit and promised to take greater care in future, but the issue remained unsettled.

We both tried our best to co-operate, but failed. The SSO was indeed very accommodating and so perhaps was I. But what could I accommodate ? My powers had been usurped and my duties interfered with. I wanted to put an end to it. I was either fit or not fit for command ; if fit, I could brook no interference; if not, I had no business to be there. I did not mind having advisers, provided that they offered their advice only when I called for it and provided also that I was entirely free to accept or reject their advice.

Surely the SSOs were not prepared to accept this position. If I were a SSO I would do the same. However good and accommodating the SSO or the COs might have been, the differences were bound to occur in units having both. In my unit these differences occured at every step, while in many other units having SSOs no difference occured at all. I must say the COs there must have either been supermen or dummies !

Some people have the capacity to overlook things when there are risks in not overlooking them. I had not. 'Trust in God and do the right' was my favourite motto. Everyone has his own notions about right and wrong, and once I was convinced I was right the thought of risks never perturbed me.

The Indian States Forces (ISF) had always been distinct from the Indian Army in many respects. In equipment, training, organization and pay they compared unfavourably with the latter though not in bravery or courage. The main reason, apart from political considerations and financial difficulties, was that the former were chiefly meant for internal security and the latter for external defence. When, however, the exigencies of service so demanded — and this happened almost in every war—some state Forces units were sent overseas for active participation in War.

Such I S F units were organized, equipped and

trained like their counterparts in the Indian Army before they proceeded on active service, either independently or as part of the Indian Army formations. The State units remained officered by State Officers (Indians), while the Indian Army by British Officers.

Before World War II, however, some Indian King's Commissioned Officers (KCOs) and Commissioned Officers (ICOs) had found their places in the Indian Army as a step toward its Indianization. They were holding junior appointments, and were facing all the frowns and frenzies of their British COs and other senior officers who looked upon them as their imposed heirs likely to push them out when fit enough to do so.

In certain units these junior ICOs were in a majority, but were unable to create an impact on the administration of the units. The British Officers in key positions were the persons who really counted. Their occasional successes in having an Indian dish or a meal introduced in the Officer's messes by majority votes were the sort of achievements these ICOs then boastfully talked about.

The KCOs had risen to the rank of Lt. Colonels, but the British policy was not to put Indians in command of active units and formations. All of them, with very few exceptions, were given extra regimental employments when they were senior enough to get command. A couple of KCOs became Brigadiers towards the end of the war, and General K. S. Thimayya was the first Indian Brigadier to command an all-Indian Brigade in about 1945.

If the Indian KCOs and ICOs were so untrustworthy, the ISF officers were more so ! The ISF units therefore had from three to five British S.S.Os. each imposed upon them, according to the size of the unit. Whatever the justification for distinction and inequalities in normal times when the roles were different, there was no reason to continue them on active service, particularly among units taking part in the same operations. To create fresh inequalities at that juncture was nothing but lack of wisdom, as they tended to lower the morale of the troops treated as inferiors and create discontentment.

While we were making efforts to boost up the morale of our troops affected by the existing inequalities some one at a higher level invented the most absurd of distinctions for the State Forces. A top secret letter was received by the Military Hospital Secuderabad saying that all troops proceeding overseas would be inoculated against tetanus except the State Forces. One British Doctor who attended our M I room daily whispered this to Major Morley our senior SSO, who talked about that letter to me and asked me not to worry as he had succeeded in persuading the doctor to somehow spare a few tubes and inoculate the SSOs and Officers of our Battery.

This made me furious. If this was all we could expect from these SSOs, sooner we got rid of each other the better. The only use, I thought to which we could put these SSOs was to help us in the removal of the existing inequalities, but here they were begging for a couple of tubes for themselves without caring whether the rest of the unit was protected or not. I told the SSO that I would not get myself inoculated until each and every person in the Battery was first inoculated. The SSO said 'please yourselves', and went to the hospital for inoculation accompanied by other SSOs. Whatever little was left of Major Morley's prestige in the unit was gone. The unit began to hate him.

The Military Adviser Artillery, Indian States Forces, Major Cooper came on a visit to Hyderabad. I went to see him. He asked me how I was pulling on with the SSOs and whether my fears about them still existed. I briefly mentioned one or two incidents, particularly the latest regarding the inoculation. He liked my action in having refused to get ourselves inoculated and said that the SSOs should have done the same and should have strongly protested. The next day he saw the senior SSO and expressed his dislike for the SSOs action. The SSO came to me and asked what I had told the Military Adviser. I said it was nothing more than what I had been telling the SSO himself from time to time.

The Military Adviser, the SSO and I wrote separately to the concerned authorities complaining against this open discrimination in regard to the tetanus inoculation.

At about this time Major Morley's brother was killed in action in France. His mother wrote him a very pathetic letter. As he was now her only living son, she was worried that he too was about to proceed on active service. Tears rolled down his eyes when he talked about that letter to me. The Military Adviser asked me how it would be if Major Morley was transferred and Captain Carbett, the second SSO, promoted in his place. I did not know how Captain Corbett would behave as a Senior SSO, but he seemed to me well worth giving a trial. So I said it would be all right. Soon Major Morley was transferred and Captain Carbett promoted in his place.

As a gesture of goodwill Major Carbett offered his own room to me for my office which, although I was not very keen about, I gratefuly accepted.

Major Carbett was an efficient and sensible officer. He had been watching the gradual deterioration in my relations with Major Morley, and was by then fully conversant with my ideas and habits. He took every care to avoid unpleasant incidents, but no good SSO could sit back completely. Even I myself would not have done so in his position. Differences occasionally occurred, but were always amicably settled.

One unfortunate incident, however, which I have not fully been able to understand to this day, created some misunderstanding in our minds regarding each other. Major Carbett, who had often been visiting his friends in other offices, came to me in the office one day and asked if we had not received a 'Top Secret' letter warning units to be prepared for mobilization. I denied having received the letter. After making a little search here and there he got hold of the waste paper basket and produced therefrom a sealed envelope marked 'Top Secret'. On opening we found it to be the missing letter. It might have been an attempt on the part of the SSO to re-take charge of the secret letters, but I had absolutely no grounds to suspect him.

Major Carbett had a girl friend in Ooty and he wanted to meet her before proceeding on Active Service. So he left for Ooty on ten days leave. He asked me to inform him on receipt of further orders for mobilisation so that he could come and help us.

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Chapter III

THE MOVE AND THE SHOWDOWN

The 5th Indian Division received orders to move, and we along with it. When we were all teed up for the move we were told to our great disappointment, that for want of ships suitable for carrying animals, the Battery would leave later. The Division moved and we waited for further orders.

A month later, (on 22nd September 1940), we moved to Bombay by a special train. To avoid any misunderstanding, I had my compartment marked as 'O C Train' and the SSOs were given a separate compartment. All COs of units travelling by special trains automatically become O C trains, but for State Forces units having SSOs with them it was a different matter. I had seen this Battery leaving Jammu Cantt for Secund abad by a special train, with the Senior SSO in complete charge and the officer commanding Battery nowhere in the picture.

I did not expect this to go unquestioned by the Senior SSO, but he either did not like to pick a quarrel on this issue or was too busy to think of that. His girl-friend had come to the Railway Station to give him a happy send off. The final phase of their separation created a very touching scene. They were holding each other with tears in their eyes when the train puffed off. The SSO stood at the footboard and the girl dragged along. As the train speeded up the girl staggard and dropped down. She was making efforts to get up when we lost sight of her.

We arrived at the Alexandria Docks Bombay on the morning of the 24th of September 1940. As I stepped out of my compartment, I found two British officers of the Embarkation Staff waiting for the O.C. Train. They conducted me to a waiting ship (SS Khandala) where I met the Captain of the ship. I was taken around the ship before we went to the ships office. The SSOs also followed. We sat around a table and the Captain produced forms and papers for signatures of the O.C. troops on Board the ship, and pushed them in front of Major Carbett. I pulled them towards me and signed them. The Captain of the ship looked at the SSO, who kept quiet.

There were some detachments of the Indian Army, and five

British Officers travelling by the same ship. They automatically came under my command. When we came out of the office Major Carbett expressed resentment over my behaviour. He said I was not entitled to be the O.C. troops on board the ship as I had no powers of command over the detachments of the Indian Army and the British Officers on board. He said he could have objected to my pulling the papers and signing them, but he did not like to precipitate matters. I told him that there was nothing wrong in what I did. It was normal for the officer commanding a complete unit to become the OC troops on board the ship when others on board were just detachments and individual officers.

All letters addressed to the OC troops on board S S Khandla were received and dealt with by me including letters containing instructions for move and conferring special powers on the OC troops for the period of voyage. We had never seen a ship before, and embarkation was quite new to us. I had some theoretical knowledge from the books, however, and had given the unit some practice in embarkation, on the ground.

After showing the officers concerned round I issued necessary instructions for the embarkation of the unit, and the embarkation was about to start when I saw some doctors and other personnel carrying trays approaching me. I asked them what it was and one of the doctors told me that we were to be inoculated against tetanus 'You are mistaken' I said 'we are State Forces.'

"We have had enough of that sir. Now we have definite orders to do it before embarkation and submit a completion report," he said. "As to how the mistake occurred, enquiries were being made." The authorities had taken a very serious view of it. This I thought was a happy augury on the eve of our departure from India as the incident, although insignificant in itself, could well be a forerunner of a changed official policy with regard to the existing inequalities. Little did I then know that I would have to fight greater inequalities throughout the operations side by side with fighting the enemy.

Immediately after inoculations the Battery proceeded with their embarkation, which was by no means a light job. The most difficult of all was the embarkation of animals. Some ship-shy mules and horses had to be lifted and pushed into the vessel. The luggage, which included feed and fodder for animals and rations for men for the journey, was put in the ship by means of large cranes. The whole thing was systematically done without noise and loss of time. The ship staff who had carried other similar units in their previous trips spoke very highly of our Battery.

The ship had just left the port when our Quarter Master Havildar, who had gone to collect supplies, arrived. We informed the ship staff who picked him up by means of a crane. This

provided the the troops with an occasion for considerable laughter and amusement.

The troops were happy at seeing the ship and the sea for the first time, and they looked around with keen interest while the officers went to the office where I issued my first routine order as O C troops on board the ship detailing officers and NCOs on certain duties and allotting troops to boat stations etc. I then went around and personally ensured that everything was all right.

The ship sailed a little distance inside the sea amidst shouts of 'Har Har Mahadev' by Hindus, 'Allah Ho Akbar' by Mohammadens and 'Maharaja Bhadur ki Jai' by all, and there anchored for the night. The day happened to be His Highness the Maharaja of Jammu & Kashmir's auspicious birthday, so we held a party in the evening to which the ships staff and other British Officers were invited, and there drank High Highness' health.

Before dawn next morning our ship was on the high seas. At day-break we found that we were a part of sizable fleet sailing in an extended formation protected by destroyers which were patrolling our front and flanks. A few other vessels joined us en route and we thus formed part of a large convoy sailing at an average speed of about ten Knots per hour.

The first few days of our voyage were uneventful. Only the unit's and the ship's routine was regularly carried. The captain of the ship went around every morning to inspect cleanliness and sanitation. I occasionally went around to see that all arrangements were perfect. Similarly all officers and others looked to their duties. Those who were detailed for specific duties such as lookouts for hostile submarines and aircraft remained vigilant throughout. In spare time, Deck Tennis and indoor games were played.

On one or two occasions I gave the alarm singal to test the efficacy of the arrangements made to face any impending danger, and for this everybody stood to at the alloted places, boat stations etc. With their life belts on, while I went around for inspection. On one such occasion the SSOs and the five British officers on board were playing Bridge, and another they were having their evening drinks. They fell in at the Boat Stations allotted to them with their life belts improperly put on in a hurry, which I had to point out to them. It appeared that they did not very much like to fall in like that for an Indian, and that too a State Force Officer's inspection, although they never gave expression to this feeling.

One morning when the Captain of the ship was on his morning round, he pointed out one or two unclean spots, but also said that the cleanlines on the whole was good and that he had found the unit cleaner than many others he had carried. The SSO tried to exploit the first part of his remarks and told me that my control over the

unit was slack. We had a little discussion, and he finally said he did not mean exactly that.

The sea had been paractically calm all these days, although it was rough occasionally for short periods. When rough, the ship oscillated from side to side and front to rear, and one could hardly walk on the deck. The ship's chairs tables and the like always remained chained to the floor. Sometimes the water dashed against the front and the sides of the ship and rose even above her highest point. It often washed the top deck and entered the cabins. Our men started suffering from sea-sickness, those on the lower decks more than those on the upper, but they went through the daily unit routine such as feeding watering and grooming the animals uninterruptedly.

The troops cooked their meals under unit arrangements, while the officers dined in the ships mess where the food, though European, was extremely nice. There were about six courses and a lot of dishes in each course to chose from. I had often dined in British officers messes for long periods while attending courses of Instruction or attachments with Indian Army units, of which I had done quite a lot, and the same was the case with other officers of the Battery. But I must admit that I was not familiar with many items that the menu contained. On the first day at lunch I ordered the first item on the menu without being able even to read it properly and hoped to get soup, which I did. I then ordered the third item and got soup again !

After the first three or four days the voyage started becoming boring; the same ship, the same people, the same routine and the same vast sea with no shore visible in any direction. Some sharks as big as a man swan in front of our ship throughout the voyage, and some tiny flying fish occasionally flew from one place to another just above the surface of the water. Sometimes some crows flying at a distance gave an indication of there being some island or shore somewhere there. Clocks were put back by one hour every three days or so.

The monotony was broken one day by an enemy plane dropping a few bombs over us, which fell in the sea only to raise pillars of water. The enemy aircraft remained at a great height and could not be seen. Another aircraft was seen soon flying over us. Small arms anti aircraft fire was opened from all the ships. Luckily it was not hit, as it turned out to be one of our own planes from an accompanying aircraft carrier, of which we had no information or knowledge. Too much of secrecy is sometimes harmful !

The SSOs had by now started feeling depressed. They knew they could no longer interfere in the aflairs of the Battery, and they had adapted themselves to it, but they were counting on the hope that sooner or later the Battery would be confronted with the

situations in which the CO would be forced to seek their advice. The way we administered and controlled things, however, including those which were new to us, convinced them that their hopes were not likely to materialise. They naturally considered ways and means to meet this challenge to their position and authority. The presence of five other British officers, who watched and discussed their helplessness inspite of their tall talk of special powers, must have provided an incentive for them to precepitate a showdown.

The Mobilisation Regulations and other relevant orders on the subject, of which I had copies, laid down that where there was no other Senior Officer to whom the matter could be referred the Senior SSO could remove the CO of a unit from Command for inefficiency, and take the command himself. There was no senior officer available on board our ship. Obviously there could be no better opportunity for the SSO to strike.

One morning the Senior SSO came to me and said that one Jemader Rattan Singh of the Battery had insulted one of the five British officers, and he should be properly dealt with. I sent for the Jemadar and the British Officer concerned in the office and heard them both. What had happened was that during the 'blackout' at night the British Officer happened to visit the lower deck where he thought he heard some animals kicking and fighting. He saw someone passing that way, and asked him to go and stop the animals from fighting. The man replied that he was coming straight from the Stables and that there was no such thing happening. The British officer then asked him if there was any Junior Commissioned Officer nearby. The man pointed to a door nearby and went his way. Jemadar Rattan Singh at that moment happened to come out of the door and asked what the matter was. When told by the British Officer in broken Hindustani what it was, Jemadar Rattan Singh took him to be the SSOs Syce who was from South India, and told him that there was nothing wrong and asked him to mind his own business. When the British Officer told him who he was, Jemadar Rattan Singh apologized, and told him that he had just returned after going around the Stables and that everything was O.K. In any case, if any animals were kicking and fiighting, which they often did, the stable sentries were always there to check it.

Considering how difficult it was during a complete blackout on a ship to recognise a person, and that the J C O had done the right thing when the officer disclosed his identity, I thought no further action was called for. I, however, told the Jemadar to apologize to the officer again in our presence which he did, and the British officer went fully satisfied.

Later in the day, however, the Second SSO, Captain Oliver, came to the office to collect law books and regulations. In the afternoon the Senior SSO came to me and said somewhat

authoritatively 'I was not satisfied with the way the Rattan Singh episode was disposed of by you. I want him to be immediately put under arrest and Captain Oliver to prepare a summary of evidence.'

I told him that the case had once been properly disposed of by me summarily, and that it could not be taken up again.

'I give you twenty-four hours to think. Think it over and let me know' he said.

'I don't need even twenty-four seconds to think. I tell you here and now that this case will not be reopened,' I said.

'I still give you twenty-four hours. I will see you tomorrow at this time,' 'He said and left.

Twenty-four hours was too long a period for me to wait, as I wanted to settle the issue immediately. But there it was. Whether it is a quality or a defect, I never take time to come to a decision. Never have I come across a problem in my life to which I did not find an answer and a quick one too, more often than not my decisions promptly taken have proved to be right, at least the results were in my favour.

I passed the given twenty-four hours in restlessness and excitement. At last the senior SSO came to my cabin at the appointed time and asked me what my answer was. I said it was the same as the day before.

He got excited and lost his temper and so did I. He sent my bearer to call the Second SSO, and I sent for other officers.

When they all arrived, the SSO rose up and made the following announcement :—

'Look here, I am fully satisfied that things in this Battery are not going on well. Therefere, making use of my powers under para.....of the Mobilisation Regulations for the Indian States Forces, I remove Major Bhagwan Singh from Command of this Battery and take the command myself.'

Everybody looked at my face. I immediately got up and declared 'It is all humbug, he is nobody to remove me from command. I am, and will remain, the OC of the Battery as before.'

There was a stunned silence, and everybody now looked at his face.

When others dispersed, he stayed on, and in a completely different tone said, 'We will have to do something about this ; let us go to a third person for advice.'

'There is no third person here', I said.

'There is the Captain of the ship,' He said. "You may go to him if you like, I am not coming" I said, and he left my cabin.

After a shortwhile I went to the Captain's cabin where the SSO was telling the tail end of his side of the tale. The Captain said that he had no business to interfere, but as a third person he thought that in view of the SSOs position and powers granted by Regulations as stated by him, he was in a position to exercise his authority over me.

I told him that that was only one side of the picture. My position in the unit was that of a commander and his that of an adviser. Even the special powers under which he was trying to remove me from command authorised him to remove me only for inefficiency. Once in India I had challenged him to take up a competitive examination with me, but he side-tracked it. He dare not call me inefficient, although it suited him to call me so as his very post depended on it.

In any case, I said that I was not only the commander of the Battery but also a full fledged OC troops on Board the ship and thereby had a special position and powers under the orders and instruction delivered to me at the time of embarkation. All officers and others were by virtue of that position under my command. The captain then told the SSO that whatever his position in the unit, so far as he was concerned I was a superior authority.

The news of the incident spread in the unit like wild fire, and soon there was a crowd of officers, Junior Commissioned Officers and Non-Commissioned Officers outside my cabin. They said that they would not let the SSO touch me and would go to any extent to prevent that. I advised them not to think on those lines, as such things should not happen in the Army, and said that I would be able to look after myself.

We had been in the sea for about a week. The men had recovered from the sea sickness but the animals started falling sick. Nine good mules died, and their bodies were thrown into the sea before we arrived at the port of Aden, where we were pleased to see the land again.

Immediately on arrival at the port our ship was surrounded by boats piled high with fruits, vegetables and other local prodcuts for sale. Troops tied money in handkerchiefs or put it in baskets and lowered them by means of long ropes from the decks and pulled the purchased articles up in the same handkerchiefs or baskets.

Here we halted for about two days. Nobody was allowed to go ashore except on duty.

I sent one officer to send a telegram, which the Army Post Office there refused to accept. I had sent copies of it by post.

The telegram was as follows :—

TELEGRAM

Ordy State

Military Adviser-in-Chief
Indian States Forces
SIMLA

The senior Special Service officer a subaltern of seven years service temporary Major with little experience of command insists on his will being carried out in all cases. Great interference even in routine matters losing prestige as commanding officer I guarantee efficiency without special services Officer but if necessary either send him necessary instructions or replace by experienced Major or above as required under rules in order save situation getting worse.

KASHMIR BATTERY

Copies by post to :—

1. Military Adviser-in-Chief I.S. Forces Simla (India)
2. Commander Middle East. CAIRO
3. Chief of the Military Staff J&K State Jammu (India)

After two days we sailed for Port Sudan where we disembarked, entrained, and reached Gedaref in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan Via Atbra Khartoum, its capital and Sennar, and joined the 5th Indian Division.

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Chapter IV

THE GOC's VERDICT

The only thing that was constantly exercising my mind was the SSO's behaviour in trying to remove me from command. I wanted the General Officer Commanding's verdict on the issue. Major-General Heath was commanding the Division. I had met him once in Secundrabad, when immediately on my taking over as OC Ist Battery he invited me and my predecessor to dinner at his house. The food served on that occasion was Indian. He was not one of the Indian-hating British Officers and was known to be a very sound and a reasonable General. He had an Indian A.D.C. Captain (later Brigadier) Dillu Choudhary.

Before seeing the G.O.C. I wanted to see the Brigadier Royal Artillery (B.R.A) but was told he was out of the station. I went to the Divisional Headquarters where I met the Deputy Quarter Master General (DQ), a British Major, outside the GOC's office. I told him I wanted to see the G.O.C. 'Are you getting your supplies all right,' he asked I told him we were getting them all right, but we wanted mutton instead of beef which was being issued to the officers with their rations but which they were not drawing. He said it was difficult to make exception in our case, as the Indian Commissioned Officers of the Indian Army might ask for the same. After a short discussion he agreed and made arrangements accordingly.

Meanwhile Brigadier Strawbenzie, the B R.A. arrived. Apparently he did not like my presence in the Div. H.Q. 'What brings you here' he asked. I told him that I wanted to see him but was told that he was away, so I thought I better see the G.O.C.

'The G.O.C. is very busy' he said. 'I know your trouble. I will come and see you tomorrow in the battery.'

The B R A arrived next morning. Both the SSO and I were waiting under a tree which was supposed to be my office. I offered the B R A a bundle to sit on and we had one each ourselves.

He addressed me and said something like this :—

'This is the second time that I have come to tell you that active Service demands the greatest degree of cooperation from all. I have found you lacking in it. There has always been some trouble in this Battery since you took over.' Grinding his teeth he said 'we will

have to try you by a court martial.' I told the BRA how, inspite of my orders as OC troops on Board the ship, the SSOs did not deposit their cameras. He said it was very foolish of them, but he said Jemadar Rattan Singh who disrespected a British Officer should not have been so lightly dealt with. That sort of thing was absolutely intolerable. When again I tried to explain my point of view, he said he was not satisfied and threatened to take me before the GOC. I said I would like to go before the GOC.

He told all the three of us to be ready to go before the General next morning at 1000 hrs when he would send a car to pick us up. Next morning the BRA took us before the GOC.

The General looked at us and said :—

'Look here you three, listen to what I say and then go. I don't want any of you to speak. I am fed up with what is happening in the unit. We cannot allow this to happen in normal times, and in war it has to be stopped at all costs. You fellows will have to work in perfect cooperation.' And then looking at me he said 'you are lucky to have two extra officers to help you. Their assistance should not be taken as interference. They are there to see that nothing goes wrong and thus have a right to look into everything. If they do more than what you think they should, it is due to overzealousness on their part. They may have erred here and there, but they are doing very well on the whole. Even in the matter of removing you from Command, they were well within their rights, although I think they should not have gone to that extent.' When he finished I asked for his permission to say a few words, but he said "No."

I was now sure that the SSOs had been the BRA and the GOC privately beforehand, and had told them their side of the story. I was not given a hearing at all. My hopes were shattered and I was greatly disappointed, but I saw no reason to give up my right stand.

As we stepped out of the G.O.C's Office I told Major Carbett that the interview was not going to make any difference as far as I was concerned, and that I would still not let them interfere in the affairs of the Battery.

'No fears' he said 'The General has now given us a free hand.'

'You will not have a free hand as long as I am here' I said. And we had no more talk until we reached our camp where we quietly dispersed.

With the SSOs so encouraged, I thought we were going to have chaos in the unit. Imagine the SSOs going round telling the men to do things in a certain way, and the CO going and giving contrary instructions or vice versa. The result could be nothing but chaos. But next morning when we met, the SSOs were entirely different persons. They asked me if I had anything for them to do, and when I said 'I don't think so,' they asked my permission to join the men

doing physical training (P.T) which I gladly gave. Daily they did their morning P.T. and then almost retired. I could not understand what this change was due to. Surely it was not because of what I told the SSOs on stepping out of the GOC's office. Then I realized that the GOC must have talked to them separately and told them to be careful and tactful.

They had changed their role from advisers to reporters. They quietly watched us doing things and reported our drawbacks and shortcomings. A very dangerous role indeed, but I was quite happy. They had always played that role before in addition to interfering. At least the interference had stopped and that was good enough for me.

As for reporting, that could not be prevented. Like all human beings, I and my officers were liable to make mistakes. Some mistakes are universally known as such, and one could try and avoid them, others are mistakes or not, according to one's own point of view. 'Nothing is good or bad but thinking makes it so,' holds good in the case of mistakes.' Inspite of the saying that wise men always think alike, I believe that men wouldn't be wise if they did not have their own points of view. If a problem is put to five different wise men, they are bound to produce five different answers unless the problem is a mathematical one. They might in the end produce a unanimous answer after mutual discussions, which may be better from the point of unanimity but may or may not be better on its own merits.

There are a hundred and one ways of doing a thing,some right and some wrong, depending on one's own point of view. In any case I confess I made mistakes and a lot of them too, but whether these would have come to the notice of the BRA, the GOC and others if the SSOs had not been there, I could not say. Here I had a whole time silent critics, always on the lookout for faults, the security of whose very post depended on how best he could convince the authorities about my unfitness.

I had great faith in myself, my officers and the unit, as well as on the sense of justice of the concerned authorities and above all in God Almighty. So I did not very much care as to what was being reported against us and went ahead with my business. Previously telephone calls were normally attended to by SSOs, as British officers who had to pass messages called them to the telephone by name. Even that stopped and we at last felt like masters of our own affairs.

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Chapter V

TWO INTERESTING INCIDENTS

We had occupied a fruit garden belonging to a local Sheikh. The trees were all young and healthy and almost all bore fruit. The garden was very thick and offered shade and good concealment to our guns and troops from the air. Such places often invite enemy bombing, but sometimes good concealment guarantees safety. Shade, and not safety was the main consideration that weight with us at the moment. The climate of the country was quite warm even in winter and protection from sun was more important than protection from bombs, which usually did not do much damage to trained and disciplined people, whether they be troops or civ lians.

The Sheikh did not like our stay in his garden for fear of damage. He came and asked me to shift the troops to some other place. I told him that we could not leave the garden, but assured him that the unit was highly disciplined and no damage would be done to his garden.

He approached the British Collector of the area, who wrote to the BRA, he sent for me and asked me to vacate the garden. I explained to the BRA that we had been in the garden for about ten days and even the Sheikh would bear me out that the troops never touched the fruit. The Sheikh should not be unnecessarily supported in his belief that the troops were a nuisance and must be got rid of. Moreover, it had become a matter of prestige for us. The BRA agreed but said he would hold me responsible if any damage was done to the garden.

Hardly two days passed when, sitting in front of my Bivuac one evening, I heard what sounded like a rifle shot in the direction of our Quarter Guard within the garden. I sent an officer to find out what had happened. A grave case of indiscipline had occurred. Our sentry on Quarter Guard duty had tried to pluck a guava from a tree close to his beat. A gardener shouted at him and there was a quarrel. Some other gardeners collected and threatened the sentry, who fired a shot in the air to frighten them. Instead of getting frightened they rushed forward, picked up the empty cartridge from the ground and went straight to the Sheikh who took them to the Collector.

Plucking of fruits inspite of my assurance to the BRA, by none

other than a sentry on Quarter Guard duty and then quarrelling to the extent of firing a shot and losing the empty case, constituted a grave act of indiscipline. I was not prepared to shield it. I collected my officers and told them how strongly I felt about it and that I was going to deal very severely with the sentry at fault.

Captain Amar Nath, my second-in-command, said that though he was extremely sorry for the unfortunate incident, this was the first time since I took over that a case of indiscipline had occurred. The sentry he said was a new comer from the Centre. He asked me to have this case hushed up and promised on behalf of all the officers that they would never let any case of indiscipline occur in the unit again.

I must say this battery was a really firs' class unit from training, administration, and discipline point of view. It was so when I took over and the credit for that went to the old officers of the unit and not me. At one time, as I have mentioned, I preferred to come to war in command of my unit which I knew and which knew me so well, as putting me in command of a new unit just before it was proceeding on active service amounted to changing horses in the mid-stream. But after I took over this Battery I found them much above the mark although the SSOs never thought that way.

Rightly or wrongly I succumbed to the request of my officers and decided to shield the sentry. We concocted story that the sentry was attached by a mob consisting of gardeners and some others armed with spears and axes and had to fire not in the air but on the mob itself in self defence. Being a raw soldier he missed his mark and also lost the empty cartridge case. To avoid any contradictions in the statements as a result of cross examination or text questions, it was decided to hold a proper rehearsal.

A few of our own men dressed like locals were made to attack the sentry with spears and axes in their hands. The sentry aimed and fired a blank round at them completing the act of reloading. A couple men from the mob rushed, picked up the empty case and ran away. Everybody was asked to make a statement and answer questions if and when any enquiry was held, bearing in mind what happened at the rehearsal.

The BRA sent for me in the evening and said that I had let him down. He told me that he and the Collector were going to hold a joint inquiry in his office next morning. Both the collector and the BRA could not speak Hindustani well and so Capt. Dillu Choudhary, the GOCs A.D.C., was detailed to act as an interpreter. The joint inquiry was held and the false statetements wonderfully tallied. Even the test questions like 'what was the man with the spear wearing ?', in what position did he hold the Axe ?', or 'how far was the mob when the sentry fired ?' brought the same answers from different witnesses. The Sheikh and his gardeners had made

firm and unfaltering Statements. Left to his sense of judgement the Collector, the BRA, or anybody would have given the verdict in his favour, but law was law.

In India, as in most Anglo Saxon countries, the law is based on the criterion that one innocent person should not be punished even if a hundred guilty escape, and that a defendent is innocent unless conclusibly proved guilty. The charge against the sentry was disproved, and the accused let off. Before we dispersed the BRA told me he was convinced that what the Sheikh and his men said was true, but it could not be proved.

This unfortunate but interesting incident thus passed off well.

I had often noticed that the British Officers, particularly those of the 5th Indian Division, avoided saluting us. I was not overfond of being saluted by those who did not mind saluting me, such as the officers of the Battery and the SSOs. But I surely wanted to be saluted by those who considered it below their dignity to salute State Forces officers. So while I did not like to take notice of all cases in which I was not saluted, I was definitely on the look out for a case of deliberate failure on the part of a British Officer to salute me.

One day I was sitting at my office table under a tree with an orderly standing at a little distance, when the Brigadier Royal Artillery's Staff Captain with another British officer arrived. Not only did they not salute me but they also kept on smoking. I offered them seats and asked them what I could do for them. The Staff Captain introduced the other Officer as his relief and said that he was taking him round the units.

After a while they left again without saluting. That was too much for me to bear. Immediately I wrote to the BRA complaining about the incident without saying who the Officers were. The BRA arrived a little later and asked me who those two officers were. I said I would'nt like to disclose their names but the BRA insisted and I told him. In the afternoon those two officers came again, they saluted me from a distance, then again when they came closer and finally once again when they arrived in front of me. They expressed their regret at their previous behaviour, addressing me frequently as 'sir'.

Soon after the BRA came again and asked me if those two officers came to me again. When I told him they did and they saluted me frequently, he asked me if I was happy. To his great surprise I said 'Not quite sir'. When he asked me why, I told him that only two officers in the Division knew they had to salute us and not others. The BRA said he would see to it and left.

A few days later our men came to know from men of the other units that orders were issued to all units to the effect that Officers of the Battery would be paid by all ranks the same respect as British Officer of the corresponding ranks.

Chaptev VI

THE OPERATIONAL ACTIVITY

The Military situation in this area so far was that the enemy, mostly Italians, whites as well as local troops, had established themselves well in abysinia and Eretria in numbers far superior to us. We were too weak to defend our selves if attacked and our going on the offensive was out of question. We were, therefore, for the time being on the defensive with a view to attacking the enemy in due course.

We had to dig-in quite a lot at defensive positions, meant to be occupied in case of an attack by the enemy. The enemy planes sometimes dropped a few bombs here and there, doing very little damage. Only once they succeded in destroying about eleven of our fighter planes lying unprotected at the airfield by diving low and firing tracer buttlets.

As we were the only unit in the area without motor vehicles, it was considered doubtful whether we would be able to keep pace with other units in war because long moves were anticipated during advance or withdrawal. A scheme for our complete motorisation was considered, but was dropped for want of enough vehicles. It was decided instead to give us vehicles sufficient to carry our guns, connected stores, ammunition and gunner detachments, so as to make us as mobile as the infantry units we were likely to support.

A few vehicles and motor-cycles were immediately given, so that we could undertake the training of drivers and practice necessary drill of embussing and debussing with guns etc, and coming into and going out of action.

Captain Amar Nath, my Second-in-Command, was learning to drive a motor-bike. He went out one day for a long drive towards the railway station. On his return he told us how enemy bombers had chased and bombed him, and how he had to take shelter in a crater dug by one of the heavy bombs with a big black scorpion at the bottom of it. Generally, a bomber trying to bomb just one motor cyclist was thought to be against all principles of bombing, and we all laughed.

Later, while listening to the Italian news, it was reported that they "bombed the Gedaref Railway Station and destroyed it", while in fact no bombs had landed anywhere near the Railway Station.

Necessary reinforcements having in the meantime arrived from India, our force, which was officialy named as the Middle East Force (M.E.F.), felt itself pulsating with power and able to strike. Although this fact was not made known to units, yet from the activities that took place within the force it was quite obvious. The troops were very happy for this change of their role. Although the attackers generally suffer more than the defenders, who fight from well dug and even constructed positions, yet troops always like being on the offensive. They were now itching for action.

Great stress was laid in the professional training manuals and during practical military training that the information para of the operation orders must contain full information regarding the dispositions of the enemy as well as our own troops. In actual practice, however, we found that this necessary information was inadequately given in the operation orders issued in war. Often these paras were left blank. Whether this undue secrecy was due to the troops being Indian, who could not be fully trusted, or to avoid leakage to the enemy through our Prisoners of war or both, was difficult to say, but the enemy was so much in the know of our positions that they often dropped leaflets over the areas occupied by the Indian troops calling them mercenaries and advising them not to fight for the British who had kept their motherland under subjugation.

Without necessary information troops were left to make guesses about the nature of the coming operations and the troops employed on both sides, which they freely and often incorrectily made. One day we found some of our troops, teed up for battle, on the move. The SSO brought the news that they were going to attack Bardia, a small village on the Eritrean Border which had changed hands several times before, and was then in enemy hands. He spoke very highly of the officers of the unit that was going to attack, and the tanks which were to move into Bardia ahead of the attacking troops. We waited for the happy news of the capture of the village but no news good or bad ever came. The inference was that the attack had failed.

Some days later we received first hand information from troops who took part in the attack. They had thirteen light tanks (supposed to be an unlucky number) to cover their advance. All except one went out of action as soon as they went into action, as the enemy had placed big boulders all over the place in the tall grass that covered the ground between the attackers and the defenders. Consequently, the attack was abandoned.

Khassala, small but important Sudanese town and a rail junction, was in the enemy hands before we arrived. We bypassed it on our way to Gedaref from Post Sudan and made a detour via Atbra, Khartum, and Sennar, but we did not then know why. To recapture it was considered essential from the point of view of morale as well as making the advance in Eritrea which we were contemplating.

The Div. was to attack Khessala, but a small force consisting of one Squadron of the Sudan Defence Force (SDF) Cavalry one Infantry Battalion and Ist J & K Mountain Battery were to advance from a flank and make a show of force before the main attack, to distract the enemy.

We moved to Showak by train, leaving our animals behind to join us later. Here the Infantry unit detailed for the task was stationed. Our train had to make an unusually long halt at one place to avoid an air raid by enemy planes flying over-head at night. When we arrived at the Showak Railway Station a British Captain from the Infantry Battalion was there with some vehicles to receive us.

We got into the trucks and moved, guided by the Infantry Officer. The vehicles drove with full lights on. I asked the officer if it was safe. 'Quite safe sir' he said, 'We have never been visited by enemy planes here.' 'We have always been visited and bombed' I said and we moved on. Suddenly I saw a red and a green light of an aeroplane in the sky fast approaching us. I blew an air raid alarm signal on my whistle. Everybody jumped out of the vehicles and took cover. Some drivers jumped out without stopping the vehicles. Bang, bang,bang came the anti-personnel bombs, about thirty of them in quick succession spread from the rear of the convoy to the front. The whole thing from the whistle to the bangs was too quick to be believed. I could hardly believe it myself, but it happened. The SSO came out of cover and for the first time since we were together uttered a few words in my praise. He had not noticed the plane and did not think anybody else had and was full of praise for me for the way I saved the Battery.

Most of the bombs did not explode as they failed to make necessary number of rotations on account of the low altitude from which they were dropped. No damage was done except that two drivers received minor injuries and a tyre burst. Leaving the damaged vehicle there we moved to the jungle close by where we were to stay.

Our men had not to be told to dig trenches and construct bunkers etc, but they were too experienced by then to neglect it and had finished all this by day break. Our animals joined us here after a few days.

It was a very thick forest, full of all sorts of snakes, from thin green ones, capable of running over the tops of the trees, to huge thick creatures moving about at a slow cruising speed and making a terrible noise. We killed one of the latter type once which weighed 50 pounds. It was said to be non-poisonous.

One Company of the Infantry Battalion had gone a few miles in front to hold an outpost position at Abuderisa. It was very unusual for a company to go so far away from the Battalion, but

this had to be done under special circumstances. We were ordered to send one section of the Battery in support of that company. This was even more unusual, but the exigencies of service so demanded and it had to be done.

I issued necessary orders for the move of a section, which involved the crossing of river Showak. The guns, ammunition and other stores were carried over a small raft in several trips, while the animals without loads and drivers, ferried and even swam accross. I supervised the crossing myself and the Senior SSO was also there. My Second-in-command and the Second SSO accompanied the section.

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Chapter VII

THE SENIOR SSO WITHDRAWN

Throughout the crossing the Senior SSO was unusually quiet. On one or two occasions he tried to find faults here and there. After the section crossed and was seen off by us we returned to our camp. On the way the SSO burst out.

'I did not like the way the section crossed the river.' he said.

'Why' ? I asked.

'It took them quite a long time to take the guns and stores etc. over that small raft. Several trips had to be made, whereas if the mules had swum across carrying the loads, it would have taken much less time.'

Time, I said, did not matter in that case. What was important was the safety of the guns, ammunition and other stores. If any mule with a gun component had drowned the whole gun would have been rendered useless. If that sort of thing could be avoided by spending a few extra hours it was well worth it.

'I cant help thinking that you have proved yourself unfit for command of the Battery' he said.

'You can think what you like, but don't pass such remarks on my face. If you have anything against me go and tell the BRA or the GOC' I said.

He said 'I have already told them.'

That gave me a little food for thought. The SSO had told them already. I did not know what, how much. and how often.' That confirmed my doubts about the SSOs being spies on me.

I thought I must also tell the Senior Commanders my side of the story, but I was not sure whether they would listen to me or say 'No' as before. So I wrote them the following letter :—

Letter No.2/Conf dated 24th November 1940 from the O.C., Ist J&K Mtn. Bty K.A., to the C.R.A. 5th Ind. Div.

Subject :—CO-OPERATION.

Since our last talk on the subject and the Div. Commanders interview I had made it a point to work in such a way that the existing impression, that I had been lacking in co-operation, no longer exists, even if by so doing my position as Bty Commander was

slightly degraded. On the other hand Major Carbett also tried to refrain from interfering in my duties and limited his activities to helping and advising and all went on very well. But he seems to be fed up with his present position now, and wants some more authority and command in the name of advice His point of view, as I have been able to understand it, is that I should do everything with his permission and always do everything as he wishes. He has started again to find faults with me and is changing his position from a helper and adviser to that of a critic, examiner and Commander. After having tried 'lack of co-operation and discipline' last time against me, he is now thinking of trying 'lack of power of organisation.' I know it is not difficult for a whole time critic to collect some points to prove anything against any body, but my power of organisation will not prove so bad as to lead to a disaster. If allowed to do so I can and will produce an answer to every problem in all circumstances, like others, and if I cannot, I have the SSOs to assist me and even if I can, I would do it much better with the assistance of the SSOs, provided assistance does not mean taking over of command.

I know Major Carbett is an efficient Officer and I have great regard for his views, but this does not mean that he is never wrong. I am certain that if he had been in a regular battery, most of his methods and plans which he now thinks are the only correct ones would have been rejected by his Battery Commander.

As regards myself I feel no hesitation in confessing that as compared with the Commanding Officers of the Indian Mountain Batteries, I may be much below the average but even the last in order of merit commands. I would like to point out that although I belong to the States Forces I have had the chance of spending sometime in the Indian Army, and in addition to my attachments with two mountain batteries and one Infantry Battalion of the Indian Army I have attended Indian and British Officers Courses at Kakul, Army Signal School Poona and Senior Officer Schools Indian States Forces (I.S.F.), all of them with excellent results. In some of the British Officers Courses I was considered above the average.

According to the Military Adviser-in-Chief's anuual reports I am one of the few Commanding Officers of the Indian States Forces. Units who are considered 'fit to command in war.'

On my transfer to this Bty I asked the Military Adviser about the position of the SSOs and he said that with me they would have little to do and that I would command and they would work in a purely advisory capacity. He also wrote a letter to Major Morely to that effect, and so did Brigadier Scott Chief to the Staff J & K State Forces. And all existing instructions and letters etc, convey the same sense. In fact if the letter of the political Department showing the necessity of detailing the SSOs with I.S.F. Units is taken literally, there should be no necessity of detailing any SSOs

with this Battery at all, but I am not aiming at that, I consider myself fortunate in having two extra officers up my sleeves whom I can consult, but they should not usurp my rights or degrade my position as Commanding Officer. This becomes more important when the SSOs are much junior ranks than those required under rules. The authorities concerned had already realized these difficulties and have therefore definitely laid down that if no officer of the rank of a Major is available a Lieutenant Colonel should be appointed as a Senior S.S.O.

The other day when we sent our Mechanized section to the forward position, and when the section was about to start from the right bank of the river, Major Carbett got excited and said to me "Will you tell your officers that I am very much displeased with their todays' work and if they did not improve at ABUDERRISA, they better come back straightaway. "This came as a surprise to me and pained me much, as every thing had gone on well according to plan. However, not to disregard his feelings, I said some words to my officers. Later on during the course of talk, he told me that I was not fit to Command a section. Needless to say that I did not like those remarks specially when they were made by an officer who has not yet completed his eleventh year of service and who has not commanded a section for long himself, while I am in the forth year of my command of a battery and am considered fit for further promotion by the concerned authorities. I am sure that in due course of time my present superior Commanders, if would not form a similar opinion about me, would atleast not find me as untrustworthy and lacking every thing as has been depicted.

The whole trouble arose over the question of sending animals to enable the mechanized (motorised) section to get across the river. When a section is machanized, it should be able to function without animals under all circumstances. There is a flying bridge over the river, on which lorries can be carried partly loaded, there should therefore have been no difficulty in getting the section across. This section was sent quite independent of animals and they went across according to plan. The S.S.O. expected that the guns, ammunition, baggage, rations and other stores would be brought on mules as he thought we had decided on this I, however, had no idea of having decided anything like that, otherwise having decided it if would not have been difficult to carry it out.

I do not know whether sending things on animals would have saved time as Major Carbett thought, as empty lorries would have taken the same amount of time to be carried across as loaded, but time was not of primary importance on the other hand it would have given us no idea of the limitations of a mechanized (motorised) section and no real estimate of how much time this mechanised section would take to get across if it had to do so, where the animal section was not available for assistance. In addition there was a

likelihood of ammunition and rations getting wet, drivers boots, putties and shorts however did not matter. I think even if the SSO had disagreed with my plan it was not such as would have resulted in a disaster, it was only a question of difference of opinion and no two persons produce the same answer to a problem, and as long as a Commander does produce an answer it is advisable for an adviser or even a superior Commander not to interfere with the Commander and curb his initiative.

Before I conclude I must confess that Major Carbett has shown good deal of broadmindedness since his appointment as senior SSO and his behaviour on the whole is extremely nice and except for a few cases, which had unfortunately been rather serious, there had been very littte interference on his part. On the other hand my attitude towards SSOs had always been very friendly and although my position when I first took over the command of this Battery was ridiculous, I never approached higher authorities, but improved my friendly discussions with SSOs and with their co-operation.

It is unfortunate that occasionally some incident takes place due to some sort of misunderstanding about our positions.

I have a great desire to fulfil the object for which we have come here, in a most praiseworthy manner and to avoid anything which is going to effect adversely the fulfilment of that object.

May I therefore request you to kindly go through all the letters etc. issued from time to time by the concerned authorities regarding our positions and show us some rough lines on which to work. I only wish that the SSO could help and advise me instead of criticising and examining and could refrain from passing disrespectful remarks.

I am not writing this as a complaint against Major Carbett, but only to get your advice in order to stop unhappy occurrences as these in future, which however negligible they may be, tend to affect the efficiency of the unit. We are, however, working with some harmony as we were before and I hope will continue to do so."

Sd/-Bhagwan Singh

Some three days later, when the Senior SSO and I were sitting in the mess after launch, the signaler on telephone duty came running and said 'Major Carbett wanted on telephone sir.'

Major Carbett went to the telephones and soon returned. I did not ask him what it was about, nor did he tell me anything. After a while he broke his silence and asked 'did you write any letter to the BRA?'

I said 'Yes.' 'What was it about?' he asked.

'About what happened the other day' I said.

After remaining silent for a while he said 'I am going.'

'Going where?' I asked. And he said posted to..... Battery.'

'Who is coming in your place?' I asked and he said he did not know. I felt really sorry for him, as I had always thought Major Carbett was a nice and efficient officer, but unfortunately his appoint ment as SSO had made him unpopular with us.

On account of his new posting he was to lose his acting rank of Major and rupees two hundred a month which he was getting as a special allowance for being with an Indian unit. With a view to saving him from this colossal loss I offered to request the Brigadier Royal Artillery not to take so extreme a step provided the SSO completely stopped his activities, but he said it was too late for that as orders had been issued.

After about a week, the following letter was received :—

Letter No. 39/10/RA (Q) dated 3 Dec 40 from the HQ RA 5 Ind. Div. to the OC., Ist J&K Mtn. Bty. KA.

With reference to your letter No. 2/Conf dated 25th Nov 40, I was exceedingly sorry to hear that in spite of all my efforts to smooth matters over between yourself and Major Carbett the friction was still occurring.

It has been decided that more harm than good is being done by Major Carbett remaining as a SSO in your battery.

I am, therefore, issuing orders for his posting elsewhere. I cannot tell you at the moment whether or not another Officer will be posted to you in his place, bu it is unlikely. In any case no posting can take place for some considerable time. I hope you will thoroughly appreciate that the withdrawal of Major Carbett will throw the entire responsibility for the running of your Battery on to your shoulders.

I could clearly read between the lines, that the Senior SSO would never be replaced, Major Carbett expressed his desire to meet the officers and men of the forward section at Abudrisa. We both went there next morning to meet them and returned the same evening. Next morning we held a parade to bid farewell to the SSO. Both I and the SSO made short speeches, such as are normally made on such occasions. The SSO said good bye to everybody and left. We gave him a grand send off. I felt as if a great load was lifted off my head.

General Auckinleck, the C-in-C designate of India, while on his way to India from the U.K. visited this place. All the officers of the Infantry Battalion and the Battery fell in, in the Battalion area to meet him. The CO of the Battalion received and brought the General to us. When at about fifty yards from us I heard one of them utter my name and I wondered what it was about.

The General arrived and shook hands with each one of us. When he met me he said he would talk to me later. This made me little nervous. Of all the people, why should the General want to talk to me? I could not guess what it could be about.

After meeting all the Officers the General sent for me and asked.

'How is the Battery?'

'Fine Sir' I replied.

'Have you any difficulties?'

'I have Sir'

'Well, what are they?'

'I am finding it difficult to pull on with the SSOs Sir.'

'Have you been to the last war?'

'No Sir, but they haven't been either.'

'Can you do without them?'

'Surely sir.'

He bade good-bye and left.

I received a long private letter from Captain Amar Nath my second-in-command at Abudarisa congratulating me at having removed the senior SSO. Referring to the SSOs attempt on Board the ship to remove me from command he had said that the hunter was hunted himself, and so on, (letter reproduced in Appendix 1). Briefly it said that they were all very happy and proud. I paid them a visit which was even otherwise overdue. It was my first free visit as a free CO.

We passed through thick jungles full of all sorts of wild animals. Spotted deer and guinea fowl were in abundance and it was not difficult to get two deer or three guinea fowls with one rifle-shot. Captain Amar Nath once shot an Ostrich in these jungles. In the rivers crocodiles were a usual sight and an odd Hypopotomus sometimes made its appearance on the surface of the water.

At Abuderisa I was received like a hero. Captain Oliver the second SSO, although still there, no longer took pride in his appointment. He was not promoted as senior SSO. He had no status, authority or special powers. Even if he had, he had seen the plight of his senior colleague who once had the audacity to use his special powers. He was already a quiet person and had become quieter after Major Carbett's removal. Previously they used to receive encouragement from each other but now, not only was his source of encouragement removed, but he was also left alone.

He was not now keen to get the Senior SSO's status or powers. All that he wanted was acting promotion to Major's rank against the vacant post, which he had every right to get. He had approached some staff officers at the concerned formations, who had probably told him that it was not possible until I made the recommendation.

At Captain Oliver's request, I, a State Forces Commanding Officer, made proper recommendation for the promotion of a British SSO who once had, and on paper still had, the power to remove me from command! The BRA, however, turned it down saying that there was no intention of filling that post.

Chapter VIII

THE BIG PUSH

The force was now ready for the big push. The 5th Indian Division was about to attack Khassala, so we were required to carry out the special mission allotted to us.

The small column concentrated at Abuderisa and moved under command of the Officer Commanding the Infantry Battalion for actual operations towards Om Hagger. While issuing my orders to the Battery for this operation I did not allot any duty to Captain Oliver the SSO, because he was a surplus officer.

We advanced about ten miles and halted for the night at a distance of about five miles from the enemy to his right flank and there took up a defensive position. The enemy sent mounted patrols to locate our flanks and judge our strength. We had occupied a wider front than normal just to make a show of force and whenever the enemy cavalry patrols tried to move to our flanks we engaged them with fire.

These patrols provided good and frequent opportunities to our infantrymen to open fire. But we were still waiting to fire our first shot of war from our 3.7 inch Howitzers which could be done only on a sufficiently large target.

One of our Cavalry patrols, on return from their reconnaissance, reported having met a strong enemy patrol which they did not engage to avoid a dog fight but one of their men was captured by the enemy. We were just considering the possibility of sending a stronger cavalry patrol when we saw a rider galloping along our front waiving a white handkerchief. All our troops holding the forward defending localities (FDL's), who had no information regarding any of our men having been captured, opened heavy fire on him but none of the bullets was ordained for him. He reached our position safely and joined his squadron. Even if he were an enemy cavalry man, opening such a heavy fire by the whole unit on one individual was totally unjustified. The men seemed to have got excited at their first encounter of war with the enemy.

A large enemy mounted patrol was then seen making for our left flank, out of the range of the small arms.

The column Commander and I were standing together and watching. I asked him if we could take them on. 'Would it be

worthwhile', he asked and I said 'yes, very much so' He agreed. I knew the Battery was itching for shooting. I issued orders for fire and luckily the first round of gun fire after the two ranging rounds burst plum in the middle of the enemy patrol just over their heads. We saw one of them tumbling. The others immediately dispersed and went into the jungle in different directions. We fired another round of gunfire in chase of them.

The column commander was very happy over the quick and accurate shooting of the Battery and spoke very higly of the Battery to whoever he met. Our cavalry patrol visited the jungle later and found two dead bodies and a lot of blood stains all over the ground.

At night we heard a couple of shots fired from a ridge in our rear. It was followed by 'defensive fire' from all our troops except the guns, without the red-over-green varylight signal fixed for it. I had orders to reach the column Head Quarters, at the signal for defensive fire. This fire was without a signal and I was not sure whether it was opened with the column commanders' authority at all. I, however, decided to go and find out personally but the bullets were buzzing all over our defensive position. I wondered if the enemy had attacked, but then what could have happened to our defensive fire signal ? I telephoned the Column Commander, he said he knew nothing as to how all that was happening. He however, asked me to come to the column Headquarters which I did.

When I reached there the fire had stopped. The Column Commanders was giving the Company Commanders a bit of his mind. He took them to task for having opened defensive fire without a signal. It was later found that on hearing the two shots from the rear some opened defensive fire, another close to him followed suit and so on impatient Brengunner until the whole column opened up. It was a great blunder but like all mistakes this too had its advantages.

Firstly, it gave the troops a unique occasion to see the effect of their defensive fire, which no troops are ever able to see as the defensive fire is opened only when the enemy attacks and then it is not possible to say whether the bullets falling in the units own area are enemy's or the units own, though in a well-laid fire plan it should not be possible for our own bullets to fall within our defensive position.

Secondly, it had the advantage of having scared the enemy. Next morning we found signs of the enemy having vacated their positions during the night and we actually saw through our binoculars what looked like their rear party hurriedly leaving.

We too immediately resumed our advance which was delayed for some time in the beginning, on account of the enemy mine fields. The Column Commander commandeered all the goats available in the nearby villages and made them walk ahead of us. This device exploded all the anti-personnel mines that fell in our way. A goat

or two were killed each time a mine burst. Later we were lucky to capture a rider from an enemy Camel Cavalry patrol whom we made to walk in front of us. He led us safely through all the mine fields.

When we reached the enemy position they had already left. Khassala was also vacated by the enemy after a short battle. The enemy withdrew to Agordat and Barantu hotly pursued by the 5th Indian Division. Both these places fell to us after big battles. The remnants of the enemy withdrew to Cheren.

The Battalion moved forward to join the Division at Agordat and we were left behind at Om Haggar to follow as and when necessary transport was available.

The Officer Commanding column did not speak to me about the move of his unit. After their departure, I started receiving messages and instructions through the commander of the squadron of the Sudan Defence Force Caval y, a British King's commissioned Officer holding the rank of 'Bimbashi' in the Sudanese Army.

I wrote to the Officer to let me know under what authority he was acting as the column or the Station Commander and what the rank of 'Bimbashi' was equivalent to. He did not reply but came to me with a file. He said the rank of Bimbashi was equivalent to nothing and all that he was given was a file and the control of the wireless station. He handed over the file to me and left.

Bimbashi, I later learnt, was a rank in the Sudanese Army equivalent to Subaltern in our army. The C O was called a 'Kaimkam' the Commander a 'Quaid' and the C-in-C 'Quaid-i-Azam'. Tne Egyptian Army too had similar ranks, but they had Egyptian officers instead of the British.

While waiting for the transport, we had a chance of acquainting ourselves with the mode of living of the local people and their cus'oms. As we moved about in uniform, elderly women in the villages greated us wirh queer shrieks sounding like rattles. Only in villages round about big towns did women wear some clothes in the shape of short 'sarees' or long gowns, at other places young and old women wore nothing except banana leaves to cover just the centre part of their bodies. We attended the marriage of a girl and saw her making a few upwards jumps in quick succession, supposed to be a marriage dance. We offered her 500 piasters as a marriage present which she silently accepted.

At last we received the required number of vehicles for our transport. A South African white lieutenant was in charge of the vehicles. He did not come to see me. One of our officers contacted him and fixed up details for the move. He did not take his meals with us in our mess but instead dined in his own tent.

The time fixed for the move next morning was 0700 hours.

Our loading and embussing was complete well before that and we were absolutely ready to move but the Officer I/C vehicles was missing. On enquiry it was found that he was having his breakfast. He was told to hurry up but he did not very much care. He turned up at about 0800 hrs, took his seat in one of the vehicles, drove it to the front and gave a signal for the move. The convoy moved at a fast speeed on a very rough road with the men and the gun components badly bumping inside. No halt was made for the men either for taking their meals which they were carrying or for anything else.

On arrival at Tessinei, as soon as we debussed, he drove off. A typical example of how South African whites hated Indians even in the Army and war.

I could not take this matter up with the concerned formation commanders, as when I met them after this incident we were either on the move or in the middle of a battle and when that was over we were out of those formations and proceeded to a different theatre of war. I, however, mentioned this incident in our periodical accounts, diaries etc.

Our animals which were left behind rejoined us here later. From here we were to proceed to Barentu about fifteen miles short of Cheren to rejoin the Div. by march route. The total journey was about seventy miles. A Cypriot animal transport Coy. officered by the British and commanded by a major was allotted to us for transport. The Brigadier Royal Artillery and the General Officer Commanding visited us here and offered to make arrangements for carrying our guns and heavy loads in vehicles because the journey they said was long and tedious. I thought that the animals had already travelled to that place without loads and if again they travelled without them they would become very soft and unfit for immediate action after the march but they had insisted and the guns etc. were carried on vehicles. The Battery, less guns etc., with the Cypriot transport carrying our luggage and rations for men and animals left by march route.

We had to march through unknown country through hills and thick forests. The only guide we had with us was a handkerchief map on thin cloth. The first days journey, we were told, was about 21 miles but we found it not less than 33 miles although we had to travel about three miles extra on account of a mistake in my reading the map, which was sixteen miles to an inch, contained no details and was on fine stretchable cloth.

There was no water enroute. Only at stages, which were fixed with this consideration alone, there were wells. For the journey all ranks carried drinking water in their bottles and about sixty gallons was carried on mules as a reserve. Nobody was allowed to drink water from his own water bottle without an officers permission.

The day was warm and the journey long and before we had

travelled about half the day all the water bottles and the mule tanks were empty and the men clamoured for more water. One or two persons fainted and the animals were suffering without water since very early morning.

We had a long way to go yet, some arrangements for water had to be made. The map showed no wells and the nullahs were all marked dry. We sent mounted parties in different directions in search of water. I myself went with one of the parties and on locating a bunch of green trees at a distance in front of us, made straight for it with a couple of water mules.

On reaching there we found a well in the middle of a dry nullah. Two locals were drawing water out of it by means of large leather bucket. I asked them to draw some water for us and offered them some money in return. But they ran away leaving the bucket there. We drew some water, filled our mule tanks and sterilised it by means of tablets which each one of us carried for the purpose.

Meanwhile the Battery arrived. Men and animals were impatient, almost mad for water. The water was now plenty, but only sixty gallons of it could be sterilised at a time and sterilisation itself took about half an hour.

It was decided to distribute the available sterilised water to all, however little their share, and the distribution was made personally by officers separately but simultaneously. But the men did not wait for their turn. They rushed at the tanks and had to be repeatedly pushed back. I could understand their impatience, and we were doing all we could, but discipline could be tested only in difficult times. I knew the battery was an extremely well disciplined unit and this case of indisipline was an exception in their case. Still, indiscipline could not be tolerated under any circumstances.

We were fighting a bloody war and were expecting harder situations. Who knew how many of us would have to live without food and water for a number of days ? It was not easy but had sometimes to be bravely faced I thought it was an occasion to strike at the men's most sensitive chrods by rousing their espirit de corps. I told them how sorry I was for not having come on active service in command of my own unit, which would never have let me down while facing difficult situations. They at once formed into queues and received the water in a most orderly manner.

Some poets in the unit later composed verses depicting how the officers, including the Commanding Officer, distributed cupfulls of water to the men dying of thirst. These were sung by the unit singers on all cultural functions of Battery.

Arrangements for watering the animals were then made. The Cypriot transport were no where to be seen. They accompanied us for a few miles, then fell behind and finally lost touch with us.

When we reached our destination for the day we found all arrangements for water already made by a detachment of Military Engineers detailed for the purpose with a motor pump and troughs.

The animals and men now had a lot of water to drink, but no food to eat as the Cypriot transport carrying our rations did not arrive. Search parties sent a few miles behind returned without contacting them. At last at about 2100 hours, we fired a couple of tracer bullets towards the sky and the Cypriots reciprocated. A search party sent in the concerned direction contacted them, about 12 miles behind where they were comfortably resting for the night but failed to bring them along. The British Officers complained that the Cypriots had refused to obey their orders, and to prove this one of them got up, lifted his whip and gave some Cypriots a good lashing, shouting, 'get up you cowards and move', but they did'nt.

Our party returned a little after midnight to tell us this but, to our surprise, the Cypriots did arrive about two hours later. The animalsand men got their well deserved meals and the Battery left for their second stage at about dawn.

The Cypriots did not move with the Battery. They had in the meantime expressed their difficulties to their CO who travelled by car and met them either on the way or at the end of the day's journey. He was trying to meet the concerned authorities to lay his difficulties before them. They, however, arrived at our next stage, a few hours behind us.

It was a shorter journey. Their CO told me that he had explained to the concerned authorities that his men were not used to long marches and the authorities had agreed that they would not be made to march more than they could conveniently do. The original itinerary was, therefore, cancelled. He asked me to accompany him on his reconnaissance drive to fix a stage for the next days march. I accompanied him in his car which he drove himself. He suddenly stopped and said "this is 12 miles according to the milometre. We would not move beyond that".

There was no drinking water available there, but he said all arrangements would be made. Next morning we travelled those twelve miles and halted for the night. Drinking water arrived in trucks. Our arrival at the front was delayed. The GOC had his doubts whether we would arrive at all. He sent Captain Dillu Chowdary his A.D.C. next day to meet us on our way and bring us along. He told us that the GOC was not sure whether those Cypriots would ever reach there. Next day we finally reached our destination and rejoined the division.

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Chapter IX

THE BATTLE OF CHEREN

We were now fifteen miles short of Cheren, a beautiful town in Eritrea around which the country was very suitable for building strong defences. Here the enemy had taken up a strong defensive position in constructed trenches, some of which were like small forts built in concrete

The enemy in their news broadcasts described these positions as impregnable, where they had decided to fight their decisive battle for Eritrea. Our troops had a series of successes at Agordat, Barantu etc. and the enemy, badly shaken, withdrew from position to position. Encouraged by this situation, the 5th Indian Division went headlong in pursuit of the withdrawing enemy and struck against the formidable defences at Cheren with the result that one of their forward infantry battalions we almost completely wiped out and some other units suffered heavy casualties. Finding the position so strongly held, the Division considered it necessary to reorganise and undergo some stern training before launching a planned attack. The Division had therefore withdrawn to this concentration area fifteen miles short of Cheren. It was at this stage that we rejoined them.

Our Battery was allotted to a Brigade. The Brigade Commander asked me if we had any British officers in the Battery. When I told him we had none, he said he would do without us. Captain Oliver the SSO, although still with us, had been admitted to the Hospital. Another Brigade Commander was then persuaded to have us with his Brigade.

The 4th Indian Division had also now arrived on the scene, which together with the 5th Indian Division formed a corps under the command of Lieut. General Platt. It was great experience for us to see two Infantry divisions concentrated for attack. The 5th Indian Division on the right and the 4th on the left, with the main road dividing the two. There being hills on both sides of the road, not very far from it, the Divisions had to concentrate on a narrow front and in great depth.

The units were well dispersed, their animals, vehicles and dumps all well camouflaged. A continuous streams of vehicles kept flowing up and down the road in a most orderly manner. Units had

to think of nothing but preparation for the operation. Rations, ammunition, stores etc. came to them au'omatically. The whole force worked like a team with complete cooperation. There was no reluctance on the part of the units or individuals to help each other, even when it was not their duty to do so. N› criticism, no hitches, no 'returned with remarks'. There was action first and explanation if any afterwards.

Smiling Staff officers visited units frequently to find if they could do anything for them. Commanders often came to find if the units had any difficulties. If a unit's mail was delayed, the GOC would not rest until the cause was traced and removed.

I once overheard some of our men talking about the inferior quality of cigarettes supplied to them, while a better quality was supplied to other unit. I wrote to the Supply Officer concerned complaining about it. Three British Officers of the Royal Indian Army Service Corps (RIASC) came to me and apologised. They explained that it was not possible to get the required number of cigarettes of the same make, and so different qualities had to be issued to different units. But they promised that that particular qualities would not be supplied to our men again.

The units were required to keep with them reserve rations for three days. These were not to be touched without the General Officer Commanding's permission. For some reasons we did not get our rations and we had no alternative but to consume reserve rations which we did under intimation to the div. H.Q. A British RIASC Officer came at once to see me and to explain his position. I happened to be out. Capt. Ahsan Ali met him and told him that he would explain the position to me, and that he need not wait any more. But the officer would not agree.

'I am very much afraid of your Churchill' he said. When Capt. Ahsan Ali asked him who his Churchill was, he referred to me. With great difficulty Captain Ahsan Ali succeeded in sending him away with an assurance that I was likely to take no further action in view of his satisfactory explanation.

What pleasure it was for anyone to serve under conditions like these, but for the State Forces used to the Military Advisers rule in the States it was more so. Military Advisers, like SSOs were nice as individuals, but as Military Advisers very few of them were really popular.

Their word, even if contrary to the training manuals, Rules and Regulations, was law. One had either to accept it or be off. One of our officers was kicked out of service because he expressed his resentment over a Military Advisers remarks made on the mess table regarding the rulers' family. This officer was transferred to my unit and put under a special report. I didn't see anything wrong with him and gave him a good chit, but the Chief of the staff recommended his dismissal and he was out.

This, to some extent, was the position even in British India and in fact, was a part of the British policy by which a handful of British Officers kept their hold on India for hundreds of years. These Military Advisers suffered from a superiority complex even in their dealings with the retired British Officers taken into service by the States. Once a Military Adviser, Lieut. Colonel in rank considered it necessary to mention in his annual inspection report that Major-General H.L.Scott Chief of the Staff J & K State Forces could not come to receive him (at the Railway Station) owing to ill health. Once a Military Adviser while commenting on a Drill order parade of a Battery criticised the length of the COs stirrups. Another, a Captain in rank, paraded the COs of a Brigade in front of all the Officers of the Brigade to teach them squad drill and was thanked by the Chief of the Staff.

For the purpose of appointments of the Military Advisery Staff, the Indian States were grouped into different circles such as Punjab Circle, Rajputana Circle. There was a Lt. Col. Military Adviser for each circle, and one or two Majors or Captains as Assistant Military Advisers. For Artillery there was only one Military Adviser, a Major, for all the Indian States Forces as there were only four states in India, which had Artillery. Over and above them all, was a Major-General called the Military Adviser-in-Chief. All of them held appointment for three years.

Every Military Adviser, on taking over, would in his first inspection report point out many flaws and irregularities, but in his last report would express his great satisfaction at the progress made during his tenure. His successor would again call the units below the standard in his first report and so on. Exceptions were, however, always there and some Military Advisors were very reasonable and extremely helpful.

All British Officers however had one quality in common. They took you as you were and behaved accordingly. Most of the State Officers were themselves largely responsible for the Military Advisers good or bad attitude.

Once a Military Adviser Artillery was on a normal visit to Jammu. I went to see him at the State Guest House. At the entrance I saw a unit tonga belonging to a Battery loaded with fruits vegetables and rations going in. On asking the driver, I came to know that the OC of the Battery had sent all that as a present for the Military Adviser's clerk.

I had just then taken over command of the 2nd J&K Mountain Battery and had sent the clerk no presents. He complained to my head clerk about it, but was told that a change of command had taken place in the unit and many such old practices had been abolished. The clerk then asked for a jersey, two pairs of socks and a mosquito net from the QM stores. My head Clerk referred it to me and I flatly refused.

Some three days later, the Military Adviser came to my office and handed me a copy of a letter which he had written to the Chief of the Staff regarding the maladministration of my unit. He said he was sorry he had written all that about my unit, he never meant to write so strongly but his clerk brought it for his signatures and as he was in a hurry he signed it. I then told him how I refused to supply certain articles from the stores demanded by his clerk. He regretted having written that letter and promised to speak to the Chief of the Staff.

Having served under such circumstances in the States, we were bound to appreciate the new circumstances under which we were now serving. Other things apart, the removal of the all powerful Senior SSO at the instance of a State Forces commanding officer was alone more than enough to create respect and goodwill in our minds for those who effect it.

There was evidently one great suspicion in the minds of our commanders and that was whether we, a pure and simple States Forces unit, would be able to pull our weight during the forthcoming operations. On our part we had no doubts.

Although we had not yet taken part in any large scale operations, yet I had so much confidence in myself, my officers and my unit and was so enthusiatic about getting independent command that I guaranteed complete efficiency of the Battery in all operations, without caring for the great risks such a guarantee involved.

It was not difficult for an efficient officer or unit to give a proof of his or its being so. But to prove it to biased and prejudiced minds such as the Brigade commander who refused to take us simply because there was no British Officers with us was next to impossible, and one who guaranteed efficiency risked his very career.

The Battery was to have arrived at this concentration area some days before 'D' day but on account of the inability of the Cypriot transport to march, we reached there only a day before it. I was sent for by the BRA of the 5th Ind. Div. and sent along with some other newcomers, to the actual theater of operations for 'battle inocculation' and for getting into picture.

A Major of the Royal Artillery, whose troop was in action around Cheren, was to explain to us the dispositions of the enemy and our own troops and also what was happening. We all met at a given rendezvous before proceeding to the front. I got a lift in Major Rodger's car, so I left my truck behind.

The party left, Major Rodgers drove the car himself. As we crossed a bridge over a little nullah, near a road bend called the 'hellfire corner' on account of its being always under heavy enemy shelling, enemy guns had a crack at us. The shells landed in the nullah close enough for us to enjoy but not near enough to do any damage.

'Have they registered this bridge' ? I asked Rodgers. He made no reply.

"Do they open fire on every vehicle crossing this bridge" I asked again. 'I don't know' he replied, pulling his parched lips apart with some difficulty and lubricating them with his tongue I did not realise at all what his state of mind was.

We drove on, another salvo landed near us, 'they are chasing us', I smilingly said, but Rodgers kept quiet. Some more shells landed near the car as we drove further. Major Rodgers drove his car to a side under cover of a mound and got out saying 'It is not safe to take it any further', I also came out of the car. The vehicle that led us also halted. Everybody came out and began to climb a hill at the top of which was a gunner observation post which commanded a very good view. A few shells landed in its vicinity as we climbed but we reached the top safely.

The Officer detailed to explain things to us found that Major Rodgers was missing. He waited for him in vain for some time and then asked me if I could go and see what had happened to him. I went back a short distance shouting 'Rodgers' Rodgers' but there was no reply. I went further back and yelled again. 'I am perfectly safe, don't worry' came a voice from somewhere. I went in the direction of the voice and found him sitting inside a cave. I told him that everybody was waiting for him on top. 'It is no use my going on top, I better stay here' he said, and I noticed that his face had turned absolutely pale.

I went up and told the Officer who sent me that it was no use waiting for Rodgers. After the situation was explained to us we returned. Rodgers joined us on the way. We went back to the concentration area. The horrors of war did not make me so nervous as the sight of Major Rodgers.'

In the evening the 'Operation Order' was received. As I already knew the Battery was placed under the command of an Infanry Brigade, the 5th Ind. Div. was to attack the enemy in two phases. The Battery was to be ready to move into action at one hour's notice after the objectives for the first phase were captured, which according to the plan was to take about twenty four hours or so.

To be ready to move at one hour's notice meant no unsaddling of animals, which affected their feeding, watering and grooming and was hard on them. It was all right if the situation so demanded, but if it was only because in these days of mechanisation people had forgotten all about animal management, it was my duty to point out. I sent a message to the Brigade Commander asking him either to send for us in front or to allow us time for feeding, watering etc. of animals. We were then told to keep ready to move at three hours notice, until further orders.

As often happens in war, things did not go according to plan, and the first phase of attack which was to be over in about 24 hours was not over in about half as many days.

This was particularly unfortunate for us, the only unit in the area neither taking part in actual operations nor sitting comfortably behind. We were about twelve miles behind the theater of operations and therefore could not enjoy the battle fully. We could, however, see the enemy positions on high features, being pounded by our guns and also aerial combats which took place occasionally over the battle field.

On 'D' day the guns of both the 4th and the 5th Indian Divisions plastered the enemy positions from Z minus 30 to Z plus something. A very encouraging and exciting scene, but to watch it from a distance was not enough for us. The Battery was itching for going into action.

It was normal for the Military Hospitals in war to discharge all Officers and men who were either malingerers or who had sufficiently recovered, and return them to units so that they could take part in the operations. Captain Oliver our SSO who was in the Hospital was once again with us. So while we were free from actual operations, we did have something to do.

A letter had been received sanctioning the replacement of the NCs E (Non combatants enrolled) grooms of Officers chargers, who were private emyloyees of the officers by combatants soldiers from the officers units. The SSO was paying thirty rupees per month to his syce, so he was naturally keen to get rid of him and get a soldier groom instead. He wrote to the 2nd Echelon for the repatriation of his syce to India without even ca ually men ioning it to me. Since the syce was his private servant, I did not very much mind. But when he asked me for a combatant syce I refused to give him one, on the ground this would render the Battery deficient of one combatant rank, to avoid which the SSO should have informed me well in time to enable me to get reinforcements from India.

The SSO said he was being treated in the Battery by all ranks as their enemy,and he broke down. I told him that his own attitude was responsible for this, and said that as Oliver he was my friend and a brother but as a SSO he was something I did not like. He said, he was not asking for a groom as a SSO but as an officer of the Battery. I told him that he could not be a SSO in the matter of asking for repatriation of his syce, and an officer of the Battery in the matter of getting a groom. From then onward the SSO used to look after his Charger himself, which gave him something to do.

The BRA visited us once and asked me where Captain Oliver was. I told him he must be in the mess. He asked me if he had nothing else to do and I said practically nothing. He asked me to give him something to do, but I said it could not be done without

depriving any other officer of his legitimate duties because all officers were doing their duties well. "Don't be silly Bhagwansingh" he said."Surely you can give him somthing to do." "Don't treat him as a SSO but as an officer of your Battery. You should consider yourself lucky to have an extra officer up your sleeves when other units are so short of officers".

He suggested that I should employ him to run refresher courses for NCOs when the unit was out of action, for short periods. But I told him that my officers were better qualified than him, as he had done one course in Gunnery long ago in England while our officers had done three each at the School of Artillery India (Kakul), some very recently. Within a few days he was transferred to some other Battery.

After a long period of suspence our need was felt in the front. I was sent for by the BMRA (Brigade Major Royal Artillery) in his forward HQ and told to go out with necessary staff to select a suitable position for the Battery on the famous hill Golodorodoc called the fort hill, recently captured by our troops. I took with me my Gun Position Officer (GPO) and a few signallers and left for reconnaissance and to meet the commander of the 9th Infantry Brigade at his HQ on the hill.

Golodorodoc was a very important feature and had a strong concrete fort on top built and manned by Italian troops but almost crushed into powder by our guns during the attack. Indian Infantry Battalions launched attack after attack to capture it and suffered heavy casualties. But when the enemy was dislodged, a British Battalion from reserve completed the final act of capturing it. The Italians made a number of determined counter attacks to recapture it but failed. Enemy guns, mortars and machine guns were firing ceaselessly all over this hill and our troops were having a good deal of casualties.

When we arrived at the Headquarters of the 9th Indian Infantry Brigade. I found the Brigade Commander and the Commander of a Field Artillery Regiment (Lt. Col. Ferguson) sitting under cover of a big bolder. The Brigadier suggested to me where I should have my observation Post and where the Battery position, but asked me to make my own reconnaissance. He warned me to be careful as the enemy had made it a little difficult for our troops to stay there. I left the rest of the party behind and myself with my Gun position Officer proceeded for my reconnaissance.

The Regimental Commander accompanied us for a few yards when a mortar shell landed about fifteen yards in front of us. He cried out and fell flat on the ground. I thought he was hit and picked him up, but was relieved to find that he was all right.

Amid the buzzing bullets, bursting shells, clouds of dust and

cries of the injured, we made our reconnaissance, selected our observation post and the Battery position and informed the Brigade, and the Regimental Commanders. I then went to the Brigadier Royal Artillery to get further instructions. He told me that the situation had changed and it would not now be necessary for us to occupy a position on the fort hill. Some other Infantry Brigade was then in need of us. We returned to our camp and waited for further orders.

The issue of rum at this position was quite frequent, particularly before and during the operations. Generally an issue of rum or supply of good fresh fruit to troops was taken as an indication for some impending operations.

We were asked to give our demand for rum. I asked for the lists to be prepared of those who wanted to drink, and then expressed my desire to see all those who were on the list. On this most of them withdrew their names. Those who still remained on the list were brought before me. I spoke to them and explained how by getting free issue of rum in war they would get used to it and would find it difficult to afford drinking after their retirement when their pensions would be meagre and the rum on payment. Most of them fell out. I said I would see the rest one by one. Some others fell out. When I waw them individually and again explained to them its disadvantages in detail many more fell out. Three men remained on the list, one havildar and two men. The Havildar said he belonged to the part of the country (Dera Batala) where non-drinking was considered a sign of meanness, he was drinking from the very childhood and would not give it up to be called mean.

I argued with him for about fifteen minutes when finally he said that he had been very much impressed by what I said and promised to give up liquor for the whole of his life. The two men also backed out. Our demand for rum was nil. The Brigadier Royal Artillery himself came and asked me how was it that our unit was not drawing their quota of rum. I told him nobody liked to drink. He asked me not to put any pressure on the men and let them drink if they liked, and asked me to find out once again and let him know. I enquired once again and nobody expressed his willingness to draw rum. So we did not draw.

We were the only unit that did not draw their quota of rum.

The Italians often mentioned in their radio broadcasts and in their leaflets which they frequently dropped amongst our troops that Indian troops were made to fight under the influence of liquor.

One day I was again summoned by the Brigade Major Royal Artillery and was told to go out and select a Battery position and

an Observation Post to be occupied by night. He gave me the coordinates of a 1000 square yards square on a 1 inch map within which I had to select the position. He warned me repeatedly not to go out of that square. I took my Observation and Reconnaissance groups and proceedad to the spot.

According to our reading of the map the ground in the square given to us was open and was covered by the enemy gunfire. There was no cover of any kind to conceal ourselves. Just outside the square were nice covered positions very suitable for our purpose, but I was not to go outside the given square. I went back to the Brigade Royal Artillery to tell him this. He took me to the Brigadier Royal Artillery.

Doubtful as everybody already was about our capabilities, the Brigadier Royal Artillery jumped at me as if I was either incapable of reading a map or believed in 'safety first' as most others in the force did, and said 'is this why you did not like to have the SSOs'.

'There are hundreds of suitable positions in the area within the square' said the Brigadier 'I have been there myself and then placing the point of his pencil on the map he said there is one some where here, here is another and so on.

'But excuse me, sir' I said 'these are outside the given square.'

'This is exactly where I wanted you to go' he said.

I showed him the figures given to me and he said 'these are wrong who gave these to you.'

I pointed to the Brigade Major.

'One of you must have made a mistake in noting down the figures', said the Brigadier. The Brigade Major (BMRA) unfolded a bit of paper and produced the figures written by the Brigadier himself in red pencil.

'I am sorry' said the Brigadier to me. 'I have made a mistake you have been wise to come to me. I knew the square you say is very open and unsafe. This is the area where I did not want you to go'

I went back, met my party again and selected a position very hurriedly as the sun was setting and there were a hundred other arrangements to be made for the occupation of the position by night. The position was occupied and camouflaged during the night so silently that even our own troops close by were surprised to see us there early next morning.

After all we found our place in the battle, where we were placed 'in support of' the 10th Indian Infantry Brigade. We completed our 'Registration by shooting' with on the Zone allotted to us and were soon ready to take anything on.

The hills around Cheren were extremely favourable to the enemy for fighting a long defensive battle. These were easy to climb on the enemy side. but were very steep on our side. There was no place in the small valley at the foot of the hills for our force to form up for an offensive or make the smallest movement without being noticed from one or the other hill tops occupied by the enemy, but the enemy movements could not be seen by us.

The only line of advance for us was a metalled road which zig-zagged through the hills along one bank of small nullah. On the other bank of the nullah was a Railway line which ran almost over the tops of high hills and then through a tunnel. Both the road and the railway line had been blown up by the enemy and the road and the railway blocks thus created were covered by heavy Medium Machine gun fire to prevent their repairs.

The railway block did not effect us for the time being. Our sole object then was to remove the road block to enable our Armoured Fighting Vehicles to push forward. All sorts of plans were tried but they met with no appreciable success.

The main hitch in launching our allout offensive was the non-availability of pack transport for keeping our troops, posted on the tops of hill features, supplied with rations ammunition and water.

The old Cypriot transport after making one trip to the top of the Fort hill, where they suffered a few casualties in men and animals, had expressed their inability to do any more of the job. 'Requests' then poured in on us from all sides for the supply of our ordnance mules for the purposes.

Ordnance mules were not meant for this purpose, so I refused at first. But when a Brigade Commander personally came and expressed to me that the success of our attack depended mainly on dumping of rations and ammunition on the forward positions on the hills, I agreed and supplied the mules. The dumping of supplies was successfully made.

The great offensive which was delayed by twenty four hours for want of dumping of supplies was finally ready to be launched. A Battalion of the 10th Infantry Brigade was to attack and capture a hill top supposed to be occupied by the enemy, Medium Machine guns, covering the road block. The signal for the capture of this hill was to be the signal for the main attack of the Division.

The Battalion attacked but the success signal never came. Instead came a message that the position was strongly held by the enemy and that the Battalion was held up. The Brigade Commander then himself pointed out to our Forward Observation Officer (Captain Ahsan Ali) pin point targets suspected as enemy Medium Machine Gun (MMG) posts. He successfully engaged them and scored direct hits. The Brigade Commander was extremely pleased with the accurate shooting of our guns, but the MMGs were still active as the actual posts were not located.

A lot of shooting was then conducted from the main Observation Post on different targets which looked like enemy Medium Machine Gun Posts. At last the Machine Gun Post was destroyed and silenced by our guns, and it became possible for the Royal Engineers to start repairing the Road Block which was essential for our advance. This achievement was particularly mentioned in the intelligence summary of the 5th Indian Division.

It was then decided to secure two little hills on the enemy side of the road block to enable the road being repaired without hindrance. A proper attack was launched for the purpose supported by the whole of the Artillery. A very difficult task was allotted to us ! A creeping barrage at night in front of our advancing Infantry over an area narrower at the farther end than the near, flanked by Railway line on one side and the road on the other, with a difference of about 4 degrees of angle of sight between the two. No fire was to take place on the road or the railway line in any case. This Barrage, which I consider the Battery's most outstanding achievement of the war, was very successfully fired. The Infantry advanced safely behind it and the attack was successful. The whole of the area was littered with enemy dead bodies, and when we advanced we had practically to walk over them.

This attack which was launched with the limited intention of capturing just two hill tops over-looking the Road Block dislodged the enemy from all its positions because the road was now clear and the enemy was afraid of our getting into their rear. The hill which was said to be very strongly held by the enemy, and which the Battalion mentioned before had been unable to capture, was also captured. It was held only by a single Machine gunner, who had a Medium Machine Gun in one hand and a White flag in the other. As soon as he saw troops approaching him he raised the white flag. He told our men that he was very surprised why they were not able to capture the hill long before as there was nobody else there. The enemy had vacated the hill long ago, but had left him there to keep on firing until somebody actually approached. He was waiting for someone to approach but nobody did. This happened at many positions held by the enemy who always withdrew from there long before we captured them.

Cheren with its impregnable defences as the Italians often took pride in calling them, was in our hands, and with it thousands of prisoners of war. Our troops lost no time here but went in hot pursuit of the retreating enemy. All the units moved out again on their unit transport leaving us behind to follow on foot in due course.

Italian troops kept pouring in from all directions in large numbers to surrender to us. When I asked one of their officers to surrender the pistol which he was carrying, he said he would

surrender it only to an officer and not to me. He pointed to his badges of ranks and said that he was a 'Captain' and he would surrender only to an officer As I was not wearing my badges of rank he did not think I was an officer. When I told him I was a 'Major' he surrendered the pistol.

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Chapter X

OUR STATUS DEFINED

Our troops were winning battle after battle in which we had the proud privilege of having played a large part. We had started commanding respect from all concerned, and disparities between us and other troops had vanished. We had every reason to be happy and proud, but that was not to be. The discriminatory attitude of the British Government against the State Forces again impinged on us, even in the thick of battle.

In the middle of the battle of Cheren a letter defining the policy of the Government of India with regard to the status of the Indian States Forces Officers was received. According to this letter any such officer, regardless of his rank, could be placed under the command of any King's commissioned Officer, although in all other respects our status was recognised to be equal to that of the Indian Commissioned officers of the Indian Army. This aimed at undoing all that we had so far done to bring our status to the level of the British Officers of the corresponding ranks, which was in fact better than the Indian commissioned officers inasmuch as the latter had no power of command over the British troops.

I wrote back strongly protesting against this letter, and not only allowed no degradation to take place in our status but also continued to fight for its improvement and with the help of the local authorities concerned achieved great success. I often had the honour in this war of having British, Australian and South African officers, detachments and individuals under my command for different periods. I also held officiating command of an Indian Mountain Regiment consisting of the Ist J & K Mountain Battery and three other Batteries commanded by British officers, inspite of this letter.

What I campaigned for in 1941 was achieved in 1943 when all the State Forces Officers while on duty outside their States were granted short Service Regular commission superimposed on their state commission.

The lengthy correspondence that I conducted in this respect is reproduced below, as it throws light on the difficulties which State Forces had to face :—

No. Conf./K/2
1st J & K Mtn. Bty. K.A.
Dated 10th June 1941.
19th

To

The Chief of the Military Staff,
H. H. Govt. Forces, J & K,
SRINAGAR.

In sending herewith a copy of Army HQr. India letter No. B/62518/1 (A.G. 8) dated 26 October, 1940 marked 'E' I beg to point out that inspite of Govt of India's decision to consider the Officers of the Indian States Forces as I.C.O's (vide letter 'A' attached) and the units of the Indian States Forces as Indian Army in all respects (vide letter B attached) the position of the officers of the Indian States Forces has been made ridiculous.

These instructions are so much behind time that I fear these would prove as impracticable as the 'Mobilization Regulations'* for the I.S.F. have proved.

These instructions although issued in Oct. 40 were received by me in March 1941 in the middle of the Battle of CHEREN at my O.P. when we were plastering Mount SACCHIL the most famous of the CHEREN enemy positions, where something more encouraging should have been received. This was after five months of our arrival over-seas, during which some sort of system regarding the position of the Indian States Forces Officers was automatically taking shape. It was just when out of experience, kindness and courtesy, the Regular Army had begun to treat us on equal footings that this letter which reduces our position to nothing was received.

During the period before the receipt of this letter four cases had arisen in which, the question of power of command came in, out of which in two cases with which higher authorities were concerned, I was put in Command. The first occasion was on board the ship when I was appointed O.C. ship when there were seven King's commissioned Officers on board, including two SSOs. The other occasion was at Gedaref when I was appointed the Commander of one of the areas for Passive Air Defence when other troops in my area [were a Company of Sappers and Miners commanded by a British Major.

The third occasion was at OM HAGAR, when all other troops except this Battery and a Company of SUDAN DEFENCE FORCE (S.D.F.) left the place. The Company of S.D.F. was commanded by a BIMBASHI probably equivalent to a subaltern of the Regular Army. The out-going O.C. Troops appointed a senior KAIMKAM,

**These Regulations empowered the SSOs to remove the COs from command for inefficiency.*

(S.D.F rank equivalent to Lieut. Colonel) as O.C. Troops by a written order although he was at some other station, in his absence the BIMBASHI automatically considered himself as OC Troops OM HAGAR but on my having a talk with him on the subject, he apologized and recognised me as O.C. Troops.

The fourth occasion was rather a disgusting one and although first of its kind so far, would become normal after the new instructions are enforced. This was at the time of our move from OM HAGAR when 18 South Africans lorries under the command of one Subaltern were detailed with us for transport of the Battery less animals to TESSENNEI. I being the O.C. of the unit, moving, fixed the time for march as 0700 hrs. and informed the officer i/c of the lorries ; the lorries were loaded and arranged in order of march at 0655 hrs. I went and inspected everything, every body was in and a report was made to me in the usual way that the unit was ready to march. I took my seat in the first lorry and ordered exactly at 0700 hrs. to start, but the lorries did not start, one of the South African sergeants told me that they were waiting for their officer i/c who was taking his breakfast, I sent one officer to tell him that it was getting late and that he should let the lorries move while he could join later in his Car. The Officer did not like the idea and we had to wait until he came, I then told him that as the pieces of the Guns were lying loose in lorries, with men sitting inside and as the road was rough, he should restrict the speed to 12 miles per hour and also halt at 1100 hrs. somewhere for Men's meal which they were carrying in their haver-sacks, but the officer did not agree. The convoy moved at an average speed of 20 miles per hour headed by the South African officer in his car and no halt was ever made, consequently the men could not take their meals until 1400 hrs. This is surely not the position the Govt. of India wants to see the officers of the Indian States Forces in.

It appears that this has been assumed that there would always be SSOs with the I.S.F. units, but in certain cases units of the I.S.F. have proved too good to need any extra officers to assist them and are running their show completely by themselves. How would it be possible then to avoid the Officer Commanding such units to take command of certain ranks of not only the regular British and Indian Army but also of the allied armies, who are working together in the field. For instance when this unit moved recently from AD TECLEASAN to TESSENEI the following other ranks of the regular etc. Army were attached to us, for about fifteen days :—

British other Ranks	1 Ambulance Driver.
South African ORS	15 Lorry Drivers, including two sergeants and three Corporals.
Indian other ranks.	1 water Lorry driver.

What would have been the position of the Commanding Officer who had no power of Command over these and how could be responsible for their discipline. I have got one Veterinary Assistant belonging to the I A.V.C. attached to this Bty. since before we left India. I cannot understand my position in regard to him if I have no powers of command over him.

It will not be possible to keep the units of the Indian States Forces (I.S.F.) the Regular British and Indian Army, and of the allied forces, in water-tight compartments and occasions will often arise when individuals or detachments of the latter would be required to be attached to the units of the I.S.F., and in order to ensure smooth running of the things, not only the officers of such I.S.F. units should have powers of command over the attached Regular Army personnel but also the powers of punishment.

If I.T.F. Officers have no powers of command over the Regular Troops, this is because their role is different and the only likelihood of their being used side by side with the regular troops is 'in aid to civil power' where the officers of the I.T.F. have for obvious reasons the same powers of command as the officers of the Regular Army, whereas the role of the I.S.F. units at least those who proceed overseas is the same as that of the units of the Regular Army and therefore the officers of the I.S.F. especially the Commanding officers should have the same powers of command as the officers of the Regular Army. But not only the officers of the Indian States Forces have been deprived of the powers of command but their position has also been reduced to nullity by deciding that two I.S.F. units commanded by Lt. Colonels of the I.S.F. can be put under command of a 2nd Lt. of the Regular Forces.

The object of the Government in not letting the officers of the I.S.F. have powers of command over the Regular Troops, whether reasonable or not, can be understood to some extent, but why this cannot be fulfilled without degrading the position of the State Forces Officers is difficult to understand. If the command is necessarily to go to a Kings Commissioned Officer of the Regular Forces, let it go to an Officer of or above the rank of the Senior State Forces Officer involved. This would not be difficult to do without any inconvenience, except perhaps in one percent cases, but it would be worth the inconvenience, if and when there is some.

I am certain that in practice Kings' Commissioned Officers will rarely be made to command State Forces Officers, senior to them in rank inspite of these instructions, but these instructions will remain a source of discontentment for the Officers of the I.S.F.

In war the State Forces Officers have not only to deal with the Regular Officers of the British and Indian Army but also of the allied Forces. It is just possible that a Squadron of French Forces commanded by a Captain and a unit of the ISF commanded by a

Major may have to be stationed at one place, who would be the OC Troops at the station would have to be decided and unless the position of the State Forces is definitely described, such questions cannot be settled. At present the position of the State Forces Officers is as follows:—

(1)	The State Officers are viewed as Indian Commissioned Officers of the Regular Army when employed outside their state (letter 'A' attached).	But they will have no powers over the Regular Troops and they would be liable to be commanded by Kings' commissioned officers junior to them in rank(letter 'E' attached).
(2)	Units of the Indian States Forces serving overseas would be considered as Indian Army in all respects (letter 'B' attached).	But the Officers of the ISF would not take seniority according to their ranks and would have no powers of command over any ranks of the Indian Army letter 'E' att.)
(3)	For administrative purposes a Major of ISF would rank senior to the Captains of the Regular Army (letter 'E' attached).	But for the purposes of command a 2nd Lieut of the Regular Army would be senior to a Lt. Col of the ISF which means that a Kings, commissioned 2nd Lieut. Who may be commanding two ISF Bns. each commanded by a Lt. Col. would be a junior member of a court martial, when others are Captains of the Indian States Forces (letter 'E' attached).

This state of affairs is bound to lead to chaos and certainly requires modification.

When the State Forces Officers are working efficiently in the same capacities as Kings' commissioned Officers and are fulfilling the same responsibilities satisfactorily and now when the officers are being trained in the Indian Military Academy (IMA) in the same way as the Indian Commissioned Officers (ICOs) and when the Govt. of India is prepared to give the same concessions to the State Forces Officers as to the Regular Officers of the same rank and to view the State Forces Officers as ICOs. and the ISF units as Indian Army, why should there be the slightest difference between the State Forces Officers and the ICOs. There must be some technical difficulties in

recognising the State Forces Officers as ICOs and without knowing these difficulties it is not possible to say how these can be removed, but the positions the State Forces Officers are holding, and the responsibilities which they are undertaking, demand that the Officers of the ISF should be recognised as ICO without distinction and the question of giving powers of command to the State Forces Officers should be left to the local commanders, as in the case of ICOs. A straight interpretation of the letters A & B attached leads to the same. If there is any good reason for not giving them powers of command, then let the State Forces Officers not have the powers of command over units of the Regular Army, but at the same time they should not be put under command of Regular Officers junior to them in rank. It would however be difficult to avoid ISF officers taking command of detachments and individuals of the Regular Army attached to the units of ISF for duties or other reasons.

This is a question for the higher state Authorities to take up, and I being the Commanding Officer of one of the units affected and not knowing whether some other units of the ISF have come overseas or not, I think I would be failing my duty if I did not invite the attention of the authorities concerned to the subject, so that the situation may be reconsidered and some modifications effected.

I am not sure whether the HQ troops in the SUDAN letter marked 'B' attached cancels the AHQ letter marked 'E' attached as far as its applicability to the ISF units serving in the Middle East is concerned".

———

(LETTER MARKED '*B*')

Sub :— *INDIAN STATES FORCES TROOPS.*

HEADQUARTERS TROOPS IN THE SUDAN.
SR/SUDAN/12406/A
18 Feb. 1939.

HQ 4 Ind. Div.
HQ 6 Ind. Div.

.....

Copy to :—
O.C. J&K Mtn. Bty.
Adv. HQ 2nd Ech (Ind) Sudan,
F.A.O. No. 2 Indian Welfare Officer.

.....

A.H.Q., India, have agreed that all Indian States Forces troops serving in Middle East will be considered as Indian Army for all purposes including welfare.

S/d--Major
for AAG.

———

Letter No. 6/38/A 2220 dated 6-12-1939 from the Mily. Adviser P.S. Forces, Ambala to the Chief of the Military Staff.

(Letter Marked 'A')

Subject :— WAR ESTABLISHMENTS'

Intimation has been received that the State Officers are viewed as Indian Commissioned Officers of the regular army when employed outside their state and therefore cheque book will be provided for each of them while in the field vide paragraph 3 (IV) of 'General Instructions' relating to the payment and the system of maintenance of pay accounts of personnel on Field Service issued for the guidence of Officers etc. 'The form A.B. 64/M soldiers Pay Book is not to be used in the case of State Officers.

———

Letter No. B/62518/1 (A.G.S.) dated 26 Oct. 1940 from A.H.Qs India Adjutant General's Branch New Delhi to all Commands (Marked 'E').

MEMORANDUM.

The following instructions are issued in order to clarify the position regarding the powers of command of officers of the Indian Territorial Forces when embodied and of the Indian States Forces when these troops are serving with His Majesty's Regular Forces.

2. Powers of command in His Majesty's Forces are the prerogative of His Majesty the King Emperor. The situation is as follows :—

(a) Powers of Command over British troops can only be exercised by King's Commissioned British and Indian Officers and where specially ordered in certain circumstances, by Indian commissioned Officers although the last named have no powers of punishment.

(b) Indian Territorial Force officers have no powers of command over troops of His Majesty's Regular Forces.

3. Consequently, where various units of the Indian State Force are serving in a formation in British India or overseas powers of command over, but not of or within such units or detachments of those units will be delegated as under :—

(a) The force or formation commander under whom a unit of the Indian State Forces is serving is empowered to delegate command over that unit to another King's commissioned Officer irrespective of his rank. This does not refer to the command of the unit.

(b) If two Indian States Force units are together, the senior King's commissioned SSO will command the two, irrespective of his rank. In the absence of a King's commissioned Officer the senior State Force Officer will command.

(c) Where a unit of the Indian State Forces and an Indian Territorial Force unit are together, the Senior King's commissioned officer will take command over both units ; should there be no King's commissioned Officer present the senior Indian States Forces, or Indian Territorial Force Officer will take command.

(d) If a regular Indian unit and a unit or the Indian State Forces are together the senior King's commissioned Officer will always take command over the two units irrespective of his rank. In the absence of a King's commissioned Officer a commander will be detailed by the formation commander concerned.

(e) For administrative purposes only (i.e. Courts of enquiry, Board and Station duties in general) Indian States Forces Officers will rank junior to all commissioned Officers of the regular forces of the same rank, but will take seniority according to the date of rank with senior grade officers of the Indian Territorial Forces.

(f) The seniority of King's commissioned Officers mentioned in the subparagraph (b), (c) and (d) will be determined by their rank in the regular Army and not by any local rank granted by the Ruler of an Indian State.

Sd/ A.L. Johnson,
Brigadier
for Adjutant General in India.

Letter No. 1376/MW dated 16-8-41 from the Chief of Military Staff to the Officer Commanding, Ist J&K Mtn. Bty.

.....

Reference your letter Conf /K/2 dated 19-6-41.

.....

The rulings in respect of the powers of command of Indian States Forces Officers in Army HQ India, letter No. B/62518/1 (A.G.S) dated the 26 October 1940 have been accepted by His Highness. It is incumbent on all His Highness' Officers, therefore, to accept them and operate them loyally and effectively.

This question of powers of command is one that always arises when allied troops are required to work in close cooperation and that calls for from all the highest qualities of loyalty, goodwill and tact if it is not to lead to serious friction and damage to the cause. Further more it is upon the officers of the Junior of the allies that the heaviest burden in this respect falls.

The difficulties of your position and that of your officers are fully and sympathetically realised, but His Highness is confident that you and your officers will rise to the occasion in this matter as you have already risen to the occasion in the field of battle.

By refusing to take offence at tactless and often boorish exercise of authority by officers and others of the senior partner, by never failing good manners, by a cheerful acceptance of the rough

with the smooth, you and your officers will not only remove the sting from the position but also will contribute very materially towards successful co-operation and so the success of the operations in which you may be engaged and the honour of your Ruler and State.

It may be taken for certain also that whether in general or in any particular case, a good tempered and moderate representation of your difficulties to your immediate superiors (preferably by word of mouth on a well chosen occasion) will result in securing their help and cooperation.

The letters marked A & B as enclosed in your letter under reply cannot be taken to over-rule the provision of A.H.Q. India, letter No.B/62518/1/(A.G.') dated 26th October 1940. The former deals with local administration while the latter is an authoritative ruling by a very high authority.

The following private letter from Brigadier Scott, Chief of Staff Jammu & Kashmir State Forces accompanied the above official letter.

Srinagar
15th August 1941.

My dear Bhagwan Singh,

This letter will accompany the official reply to your letter regarding the ruling of A.H.Q. India (G.H.Q. now) in respect of the powers of command of State Officers. I hope the cold official reply will not give you the impression that your difficulties in this respect are not realised or that we are unsympathetic, but the ruling is based on high constitutional law and nothing that we could do possibly alter it.

When one is not concerned primarily and personally it is easy to give advice and preach patience.

"The toad beneath the hanow knows"

"Just where each sharp toothed prong goes"

"The cricket safe upon the road"

"Preaches contentment to the toad."

I fear that the quotation is not quite accurate but it conveys the idea.

But you fellows must just accept what cannot be altered and must by tact and patience avoid letting things come to a head. Most people are reasonable to us if we are good tempered and reasonable to them. He who always is on the look out for slights usually finds them at every turn while he who is careful to offer no slights to others and not to look for them from others seldom feels ill-treated.

It seems to me that you yourself behaved with tact, sound commonsense and wisdom when that convoy incident occurred. The other fellow the M.T. Officer seems to have laid himself out to give you offence and so to force a quarrel. You refused to be drawn and though deeply hurt refused to quarrel. There is no doubt at all that it was you and not he who scored. Certainly you must have met many jacks in office and ill mannered boors and no doubt you will meet many more. If you treat those of the future as you treated the M.T. Officer defeat will not lie with you.

With all good wishes to you and to all ranks. We wonder where you are now.

H.L. Scott.
No. Conf/K/15
Ist J&K Mtn. Bty. K.A.
Dated 5 Nov. 41.

To

The Chief of the Military Staff,
H.H. Govt. Forces, J&K, Jammu Tawi.

Reference your No.1376/MW of 16/8/41.

This above letter leaves no room for further arguments on the subject, but the sympathies expressed by you have encouraged me to express my views more fully.

I know the ruling is based on high constitutional law, and there is no reason to doubt its reasonability. I can very well understand the reason for not giving state officers powers of command over the Regular Army, but how that law is violated if a senior State Officer is not put under a junior Kings Commissioned Officer, is difficult to understand.

If the ruling in question be literally taken it is illegal to attach personnel or detachments of Regular Army with the units of the State Forces not commanded by Kings or Indian Commissioned Officers but this is absolutely impracticable in war for so many reason, and the State Forces officers will have to actually command individuals or detachments of the British, Indian or other allied armies without having any power of command. It therefore remains to be decided whether the law would be honoured more by making it practicable after necessary modifications and working it, or by leaving it as it is working contrary to it.

No doubt it is incumbent on all His Highness' Officers to accept the ruling and the loyalty which the State Officers have towards their Ruler, will prevent them from departing from the policy accepted by His Highness, but whether they can put their hearts into work when their position is degraded and all prestige lost will depend on the type of Officers involved.

On the other hand if the State Officers who are as keen on doing all they can for the common cause as anybody else are made

to feel by word and deed that in the eyes of the senior partner they are not inferior in any way, but have exactly the same position as that of their other brother officers fulfilling the same responsibilities, they would certainly do much better than for which their duty binds them.

From the way our superiors under whom we have worked so far have treated us, I doubt if occasion will ever arise when our feelings will be injured, but there is no reason why the superior commanders here should not be guided by the decision of the authorities higher than them. I simply wish that the unfortunate occasion does not arise.

One of the possible solutions is to confer on the State Officers temporary King's or Indian Commission, when they leave their States. The former will be complete and the latter only a partial solution of the problem, but will go a long way to remove the discontentment, created by the ruling in question.

Some other suitable solution may be found out but the State Officers may not be allowed to feel that inspite of their sincereity, loyalty, efficiency and keeness they can never be treated as equals.

To show what others think of the prevailing conditions regarding the position of the States Forces I would like to quote a sentence from the editorial notes of the I.S.F. Annual 1941 page 3, paragraph 1, which reads as follows :—

'Provided the prejudice and false sense of dignity are flung aside, and realities faced, the I.S.F. need not fear comparision with the rest of the Imperial forces.'

In the next paragraph it says:—

'Whatever the future may have in store, there can be but one final result, if whole hearted mutual cooperation and trust are accepted as guiding principals.'

The above expressions leave nothing more to be written on the subject and suggest a definite change in the policy, which I hope will be effected before long if a proper representation is made to the concerned authorities, already known for fairness.

If however the decision has to stand then the States can avoid good deal of discontentment by inculcating in the State Officers a sense of inferiority from the very beginning, by keeping their standard of training as low as that of the officers equivalent of whom they are likely to be considered, when working outside their State, i.e. officers below he rank of a 2nd Lieut. Or in other words a subedar, because even a junior State officer commissioned and trained on modern lines would not like to be commanded by an officer just junior to him in rank, possessing more or less the same qualifications. To expect senior State Officers with some experience, to be willing to

serve under the command of a very junior officer is quite a different matter.

It is pointed out that all the correspondence on this subject is being done with goodwill and with the idea of accelerating the efforts for achieving the desired end.

Sd/ BHAGWAN SINGH,
Lt. Col K.A.
Comdt. Ist J&K Mt. Bty. K.A.

Chapter XI

ASMARA CAPTURED

We followed the Division by march route. On our first day of march we travelled about ten miles and halted for the night. In the evening the GOC and the BRA drove in our camp. They told me that they were held up again on account of another road block about fifteen miles ahead, and that the services of our Battery were most needed as the country was very unsuitable for the mechanised batteries to come into action. I asked for two trucks to enable me to take my staff ahead of the Battery to carry out reconnaissance in time, which were provided.

Next morning I proceeded with my staff to report to the HQ 29th Inf. Bde. whom we were required to support. The Battery followed. Soon the Battery came into action on the reverse slopes of a hill, unnoticed by the enemy, although the whole thing was done in broad daylight. Only one troop of a British Field Battery of the Div. had managed to come into action by the side of the road. Both their and our Observation Posts happened to be on the same hill.

The whole of the front of the division was distributed into two zones and one each was allotted to the troop and the Battery. We were permitted to Register by shooting. I was just in the middle of my initial orders when an infuriated staff officer came running to me. 'Stop' he side. 'You have killed so many of our own men.'

'But I haven't fired a shot yet.' I said. He then went to the troop commander, who was not far off and asked if it was he. The troop commander, a British Major, confessed to his disastrous mistake. The Infantry Brigade commander who also arrived in the meantime smiled and said 'how easy it is to make mistakes'. Whether he would have smiled and said the same thing if the rounds had been fired by me, I do not know. But it was obvious that in order to win the confidence of their British Commanders, a unit completely Indian from top to bottom like ours had to be over efficient.

However we both registered important targets within our respective zones and were just watching the front when some enemy movement was noticed on a distant skyline in the other Battery's

zone. The GOC asked its Commander to take it on, but he expressed his inability on the plea that our own troops were so close to the enemy that it was not possible to engage them without shooting our own troops.

'What a pity' said the GOC. But the fact was that the officer after his first mistake had become a little nervous and consequently over-cautious. 'I can take it on sir' I said to the General. But that was too much for him to believe. Here was a British Officer, one of the paragons of efficiency in India, finding himself unable to take the enemy on within his own sector, and a State Forces Officer was so confidently asking for an opportunity to engage the same target well outside his zone of responsibility.

'But what about our own troops' asked the GOC.

'I can guarantee their safety sir' I replied.

'All right then have a crack' the GOC said.

I started shooting at a safe range first and then crept on to the target. The first group of fire for effect landed plum in the middle of the enemy. 'Well done' said the General. "Carry it on". A few more groups of gun fire were fired before the enemy disappeared.

This createy so good an impression in the minds of all concerned that the Indian States Forces, or at least the J&K Mountain Battery, was no longer looked upon as an inferior and dispensable unit. Not only that, but from then onwards whenever any enemy appeared anywhere on the whole front the GOC always shouted for me regardless of whether the enemy was in my or the other officer's zone. All targets were very successfully engaged.

In order to take full advantage of our ability to come into action almost anywhere on the hills, which no other Battery in the Force could do; and of the accurate and effective shooting our Battery was capable of conducting, we were told to move to a forward position and have our observation post among the foremost troops almost in the enemy lines, which was the only place from where the enemy could be seen. The move took place in broad daylight, and the whole battery moving along the road in column of subsections although in groups of not more than ten mules each presented too big a target to be missed by the enemy. We saw three enemy bombers approaching and were just expecting to be bombed, when two of our fighters suddenly appeared from nowhere and chased the bombers away.

I had gone ahead with my staff and had selected an Observation post while the Gun Position Officer had selected a Battery position. The telephone line between the Observation Post and the Battery position was laid but guns did not come into action for a long time. I talked to my Gun Position Officer over

the telephone and told him to go back and find out what had happened. He went back and brought the report that on account of heavy enemy shelling on a road bend, the Battery leader Subedar Ali Has an Shah had halted the Battery under cover and was waiting for the fire to cease. The Gun Position Officer (Captain Ahsan Ali) told the Battery leader to cross the bend one by one at a double, and come to the Battery Position without further delay, which they did.

Both the Observation Post and the Battery position were occasionally shelled and machine gunned, but the position was soon occupied. Gunner Mangal Singh was hit by a splinter and immediately killed He was properly cremated according to Hindu rites in the middle of the fighting, although normally dead bodies were buried in war.

This was our first war casualty in actual operations. Previously one of our drivers had died in hospital of dysentry, when we were in Showak. On his death the Officer Commanding Military Hospital, about sixty miles away from us, informed us on telephone, when his burial was to take place. We told him not to bury the dead body, which we later brought in our unit on a special truck sent for the purpose and cremated according to Hindu rites.

Although rules allowed the cremation of dead bodies of Hindus in war where possible, and a sum of Rs. 30 per dead body was allowed for the burial or cremation, in practice no dead bodies were ever cremated even where conditions permitted. I made a mention of this in my war diary and remommended that Hindu dead bodies must be cremated according to Hindu rites as far as possible.

We were given a programme shoot in support of an attack. I was in the middle of my orders when the telephone line between the Observation Post and gun position broke down on account of heavy and concentrated shelling on a road bend through which it passed. The fire was incessant and it was very difficult if not impossible to mend the line. Many vehicles were shattered to pieces at this bend and drivers and troops killed and wounded. This was a bend which everybody moving from front to rear or rear to front had to cross, as there was a deep nullah on one side and a steep cliff on the other. It was here that the battery hesitated to advance. We too crossed it on our way to the OP and the Battery position, but then the firing was not so incessant.

The Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) incharge of signallers at the Observation Post detailed L/NK (later Major) Qabla Singh to go and mend the line. When he went near the bend he tapped in his telephone and informed the OP that it was not possible to mend the line on account of heavy and incessant shelling. He described the scene at the bend with wounded and dead lying all over

the place as unbearable. When the NCO incharge of Signallers told me this I told him to tell QABLA SINGH to mend the line at any cost which he soon did, thus enabling the Battery to fire the programme shoot successfully in time. For this act of gallantry and devotion to duty at great risk to his life I recommended L/NK Qabla Singh for an immediate award of Indian Distinguished Service Medal (IDSM) which he later received.

When the attack succeeded our forces resumed their advance. Our telephone line was reeled up and the guns were being limbered up. The Infantry Brigade Commander came to me and showed me a large enemy force about the size of an Infantry Battalion moving on our left flank accross a small nullah.

'The enemy is counter attacking' he said 'and one of our companies is in danger. Unfortunately I have no reserve in hand at present to meet the threat. Could you take them on?'

'It was a fine target for us' I said, 'but unfortunately I am not in touch with the Battery at the moment, our communications having been closed.'

'Please do something' the Brigade Commander said. 'You can try the infantry communications.'

Luckily the Brigade had a line laid to their rear Headquarters close to the gun position. I called the Gun Position Officer on their telephone and explained to him the situation. He said he could clearly see the enemy coming and would immediately take them on. He brought the guns into action at once and laid them direct by open sight and fired a few rounds.

The whole force could see the effect of this shooting. It was so accurate that with-in a few moments the counter-attack fizzled out and the company was saved. The Brigade Commander was extremely pleased and thankful.*

The Battery then advanced to another forward position within a few hundred yards of the main enemy defences. The day was drawing to a close, and we had to carry out our registration by shooting before dark and get ready to support an attack early next

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**In 1948, seven years after this happening, when I was Comptroller of His Highness the Maharaja of Jammu & Kashmir's Household, a ring came on the ADC's phone. Brigadier Jayal of the Indian Army was on the phone at the palace gate. He expressed his desire to come in and see me. We had not seen each other before, but when he came in he met me very warmly and asked me if I knew who he was. I replied in the negative. He said he was the Commander of that Infantry Company which was saved by us in war when it was counter-attacked by the enemy. He made no hesitation in confessing that the award of a Distinguished Service Order (D.S.O.) which he received for having repulsed the counter-attack so successfully, he owed to me.*

morning. Although the Training Manuals say that the time spent reconniassance is never wasted, we could not afford to spend much time on it and had to select the O.P. and the Battery position hurriedly. The Infantry on the foremost position were our OP was, had been there for sometime. They had dug trenches for them, while we had neither the time nor the tools to dig.

We were busy with our registration when a shell burst within about fifteen yards of us with a tremendous bang raising hundreds of pebbles to great heights, which kept on raining on us for a long time after the bang. Another followed a few seconds later and then another. Each time we heard the sound of the next shell coming making a peculiar noise we of the Observation staff lay flat on the ground not knowing whether we would rise again. I often wondered how we were saved.

We could not locate this enemy battery exactly, but we had located the area from which it was firing. We engaged it for sometime and the rate of enemy firing slowed down.

It looked as if the Italians were fighting their last battle here (at Ad Teclesan) for the defence of Asmara, the capital of Eritrea. In my opinion the enemy gave us a better fight here than at Cheren. They were, however, unable to withstand our constant pressure for long and had soon to give way. Next morning an Italian car flying a white flag drove into our positions and was taken to the Force Headquarters. This carried the Italian Commander responsible for the defence of Asmara. He declared Asmara an open town. White flags appeared almost on top of every hill in the enemy area.

Our forces entered Asmara triumphantly and were welcomed by the citizens, mostly Italians, with mixed feelings. White Flags were hoisted on all houses and shops in large numbers. The citizens looked frightened for the first few days, but finding themselves nicely treated by us soon started going about their business and fraternized with us.

The main Italian forces had withdrawn to Massawa and were hotly pursued by our motorised forces. Thousands of Italian troops, including some complete ancillary units, surrendered and were taken prisoner.

We had again to stay behind, as we could not keep pace with the motorised units. I however visited Asmara soon after its surrender for a couple of hours. Parties of officers and other were also sent to see the town.

Here we had a good chance of seeing the vacated enemy gun position which was one of the targets we fired at. One complete detachment was lying dead near a gun, as if by a direct hit. Shells had fallen very close to the other guns. A lot of ammunition was lying close to the guns in trenches.

It did not take our forces long to deal with the Italians who had fled to Massawa, which soon fell to us. A large number of the enemy were captured and the rest fled to Italy. Freed from here our forces proceeded to Abyssinia.

Asmara, the Capital of Eritrea, was a beautiful little town with Italian population. A few Indians and locals also lived in one corner of the town. A deputation of big Indian businessmen met the British Administrator of Asmara in his office and expressed their pleasure at the arrival of their "masters" in Asmara. They, however, took no notice of us. The shops were all owned by Italians and were manned, some by men and others by women.

We made a few purchases including wrist watches which I presented to officers, JCOs etc as a token of my appreciation for the excellent work done by them throughout the operations. The price was paid in Indian money which the Italians very gladly accepted.

There was a small fort in Asmara on a hillock a short distance away from the town. Thousands of Italian prisoners of war were awaiting expatriation to India in this fort. Italian women in large numbers kept visiting the fort from morning till evening daily to supply fruit, milk and other eatables of their choice to their relatives and talked to them with eyes full of tears. These prisoners of war were later sent to India and kept in the Yole camp in Kangra district of the Punjab.

All vehicles in Asmara were left hand drive and all traffic kept to the right, instead of the left as in India. This was however changed by us to conform to our pattern. FIAT company had a factory here where FIAT cars were manufactured. A portion of its building was fourteen storeyed.

Thus the first phase of our active operations in the war ended successfully. Our mountain battery had convincingly proved its worth and mettle, and the myth of State Force inferiority had been effectively shattered. What is more, we had proved our ability to function well without the British SSOs that were usually thrust on all State Forces units.

Chapter XII

THE CHANGE OF FRONT

Operations were now about to start in Syria, where the French Forces which were formerly our allies had decided to owe allegiance to the Vichy Government after the invasion of France by Germany. It was not yet decided whether we should proceed to Abyssinia or to Syria. We were now in demand everywhere and much more famous than we were before the Cheren operations.

General Platt commanding the Corps, General Heath GOC Fifth Indian Division, and commanders of all the Brigades we supported personally visited us to congratulate us. Some sent congratulations by letters. General Heath during his last visit to us before his transfer to the SEAC (South East Asia Command) on promotion paid a high tribute to the Battery. He admitted that it was not necessary to have SSOs with a unit like the First Jammu and Kashmir Mountain Battery. He said he would repeat this to General Headquarters (GHQ) India. He, however, advised me to have one British Officer in the Battery, not as a SSO but as an ordinary officer. I expressed my reluctance and the General did not insist.

Just when we were being required both at Abyssinia and Syria the African Horse sickness called Nigma unfortunately broke out in the Battery and we could proceed to neither of the two places. The disease quickly spread and all the animals were affected. Within three days seventy of them died. Jemadar Advappa I.A.V.C., who accompanied the Battery from India, tried his best but could do little to control the disease. Experts had to be called. The required medicines too were not available and had to be requisitioned. The epidemic subsided after a few days resulting in the loss of about one hundred extremely good animals, which could not be replaced even in peace time.

It took our surviving animals some days to recover fully and meanwhile operations in Abyssinia neared their end and those in Syria were about to start.

We had to complete our deficiency in animals out of the captured and surrendered Italian animals. These were too small for our loads, but there was no other alternative. We employed the Italian mules as first line mules and our first line mules as ordnance

mules. When fit again we were told to march back to Tessinei whence we had to entrain for an unknown destination.

This backward march was quite different from our onward march although through the same stages. While during our onward march perfect administarative arrangements were made at very stage, now during our backward march no such arrangements were considered necessary. When I met the concerned staff at Asmara and told them what arrangements were necessary for us on our way back they had noted the points down and promised to make all the arrangements. But we found no arrangements at the stages, not even for water.

At the end of our first day's journey we had to pull water from deep wells by means of improvised kit, and it took us several hours to water our animals. I sent telegram after telegram asking for arrangements and I was told these were made at the next stage, but when we reached there the next day there was nothing as usual.

I then sent a message saying that the Battery would not resume its march until satisfactory arrangements for supply of water were made. One British Captain then came to see me. He said that arrangements had been made at the next stage but I told him I was not going to be deceived anymore. I asked for at least ten water lorries to accompany us throughout our march. Eight water lorries were immediately attached to us.

At Tessinei we entrained, not knowing for where Moves of units are always secret during a war, but the Commanding Officers of the units moving have to be taken into confidence. I was, however, given no information, probably because I was an Indian Commanding Officer, a very rare thing in the Indian Army then.

As the length and the duration of the journey was not known to me, I was enable to decide whether to stop the train somewhere and water the animals or wait until we reached our destination. Feeding and watering of animals was therefore often delayed. When we arrived at Wadi-i-Halfa we were told by the Railway Transport Officer that we had to embark on steamers and barges there and sail down the river Nile.

Nobody had bothered to work out the number of barges we would need. It was found that the number of barges available was insufficient and we had to wait until additional barges were procured. This part of our journey though uneventful was quite interesting, being our first voyage in steamers. The water level in the river had fallen, the steamers stuck to the ground at one or two places and had to be pulled out with great effort.

On reaching Wad-Madni* we disembarked, but could not

**I am not sure of this name.*

immediately entrain as planned on account of the enemy's air activity further on in the direction of our advance. This was a very unsuitable place for us to halt. The days were extremely hot, and there was no shade for men and animals. The Egyptian Station Master here was very helpful. He provided us with large water proof covers, which enabled us to arrange some shade.

At last we entrained and left the place. We passed through CAIRO and arrived at Kantara on the Suez Canal. Our people were pleased to see these historical places and the famous Suez Canal. Here the remnants of the barbed wire defences erected in the World War I were still seen at places.

On crossing the Suez Canal we entrained again. To avoid difficulties which we experienced during our previous journey, I thought I should get some information with regard to the length and the duration of the journey. I went to the RTO and asked him where we were going. 'Up North Sir,' was all that he told me. When I told him that did not help me at all, he expressed his inability to tell me any more as it was a dead secret. When I returned to my compartment I saw some of our men buying oranges from a fruit seller at the platform. The fruit-seller told them where the unit was going, and added that oranges would be very cheap there.

The train puffed off, and before long we were passing through the vast orange gardens of Palestine. The train halted at a small station, where the Railway Transport Officer asked us to detrain. I asked the Railway Transport Officer where we were to go next. He said he had no idea but had instructions simply to drop us there. This was Hadera.

Leaving the Battery at the Railway station I went to the village accompanied by my staff to find out if there were any other troops in the area who could tell us something. We met a British Officer who told us that we were to move to a place called El-Lajjun over the famous Mus-Mus (Megido) pass, by march route. After watering and feeding our animals we marched to El-lajjun. We sent a party to draw our rations from a British supply Depot at Haifa. They issued them rice, atta, pulses etc and said that two items on our indent, ghee and salt, were not available. When told Indian food could not be cooked without these items they brought those from another supply Depot miles away. When our men passed through the Haifa bazars people left their business and gathered in large numbers shouting "Hindi Hindi" to see them.

Here we were supposed to reorganise and be prepared for operations in Syria. Commanders and staff officers paid us many visits and offered us all sorts of help. Our deficiencies in clothing and equipment were completed.

Fruits were abundantly supplied to the troops with their rations. I asked for a motor car for my use and one Packard with a Jew driver was immediately hired and supplied to me at fifteen rupees daily plus necessary P.O.L.

A batch consisting of one officer (captain Mohammad Din) and about thirty other ranks arrived from India to join us as additional first reinforcements. In short everything was alright except that I was not satisfied with the Italian mules we had. I was told to replace them from a Cypriot Mountain Battery with British Officers which was under orders for disbandment on account of bad discipline. But even those mules were not better than the captured Italian mules.

While we had nothing else to do except wait for further orders for our move into Syria, we thought it was high time we arranged some recreation for the troops. We arranged a dramatic show at night, which lasted until eleven. At about one-thirty the same night we were awakened by two tremendous explosions. The enemy planes had dropped two heavy bombs after floodlighting our camp with parachute flares. One bomb had landed about a hundred yards from our mess tent and the other about a thousand yards away towards the animal lines.

The craters created by these bombs were about ten feet deep and forty five feet in diameter. Our camp and animal lines were well dispersed, so no damage was done except that a mule fractured its shinbone. It was destroyed by shooting and buried in one of the craters. Probably the use of petromax lamps at our dramatic show was the cause of it all. Lights were however being used freely by troops and civilians in Palestine and no bombing had ever taken place before.

We also sent parties for sight seeing to Jeruselum, Haifa, Tel-Aviv and other places of interest. I went to Jeruselum myself accompanied by Captain Ahsan Ali and Captain Richard Tewson who was earmarked for appointment as adjutant of the 26th Mountain Regiment which was in the processes of being formed.

On our way to Jeruselum we passed through places where our First Jammu and Kashmir Infantry, which I had later the honour to command on my return to India, had fought battles during the World War I. We visited both Jeruselums, the old and the new. It has since been divided, the old Jeruselum having gone to the Arabs and the new to the Jews. Palestine is no longer the British projectorate that it was during the war. It is now an Independent country called Israel, about 8000 sq. miles in area with about 17,00,000 inhabitants mostly Jews. We visited the two ancient buildings, Bait-ul-Harem and Bait-ul-Muqqaddas.

The Bait-ul-Muqqaddas is managed by Mohammadans as a mosque and Bait-ul-Harem or Bethelhem, where Christ was born,

by Christians as a church. The clergyman in charge of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre showed us the inside of the church carrying a burning candle in his hand. The stone stairs bore deep cuts caused during the fighting that took place between the supporters and opponents of Christ. These marks have been preserved by means of strong wire netted covers placed on the steps. At the end the clergyman asked for money under the pretext of buying candles. A dome of this building had badly cracked and was prevented from falling by means of a cat's cradle of iron shorings built by the British in 1935. A scaffold has been put up to protect the visitors from falling masonry.

When we went to see the mosque a gatekeeper told us that ouly Mohammedans could go in at that time, others could go only after 4 P.M. Captain Tewson could be easily distinguished as a non-Mohammedan so he had to be dropped, while we both went in. The Imam had been to India and knew Urdu very well. On being asked by him I gave my name as Umre Khan. He started uttering something, with his hands held as Mohammedans always offering prayers and his eyes half closed. Capt Ahsan Ali and I did the same. In the end he asked for money and I immediately gave him a £ 1 Egyptian currency note. He had no doubt now that I was a devout Mohammedan !

We then went to see the wailing wall of the Jews. It was a wall about 30 feet long and 10 feet high in front of which Jewish men and women wail and weep. We also saw the Dead Sea a few miles away in Jordan, which is about 1300 ft. below sea level. It is a short of holiday resort. There was a small hotel there which provided all necessary amenities. People bathed in the Dead Sea and it was said that nobody could get drowned in it on account of the high specific gravity of its water due to there being a high quantity of salt in it.

We Visited Haifa a very beautiful little town, built by Jews who were externed from Germany by Hitler after his rise to power before World War II. It compares well with any modern European town, with all modern amenities such as upto da e cafes and cuisines. All shops were run entirely by the Jews and all the selling was normally done by girls. I asked for a bottle of coconut oil at one shop and one of the sales girls replied "We don't have coconuts in this country like India. We have Olives." British soldiers were normally found having a good time at these shops. The girls kept the customers happy and looked after them well. For instance if you asked for a bush shirt at a ready-made garments shop a girl would take you to a separate room with a lot of mirros all round and would take your measurements. While measuring your waist and neck, she would almost embrace you. No wonder their sales were pushed up quite a lot in those days.

Even outside the shops and the Bazars single girls dressed in tight shorts waited at odd places, making 'V' for victory signs with their fingers asking for lifts as any army vehicles passed by, which were almost invariably provided by troops with pleasure. There were instructions, too, that requests for lifts by civilians should be complied with as far as possible. No other instructions were better obeyed ! The Jews, although very badly deprived by the Nazis of most of their cash and property at the time of their externment, were still very rich. They settled in Palestine with the help of the Americans and the British, but they helped themselves quite a lot. Not only did they build beautiful towns like Haifa and Tel-Aviv, but they also brought into existence several model villages each containing a school, a hospital, a post and telegraph office, a cinema, a club, an Electric Sub-station, a water pumping station with taps all over, and other amenities which many Indian towns, let alone villages, are still dreaming of.

Affula was one such village we visited. It was not far from El-Lajjun. One could easily distinguish between a Jew and an Arab village from a distance or from the air. The Jew villages looked green and clean, while the Arab villages were dry and dirty, consisting of mud houses with no water available except in distant wells whence it was carried by women or on camels or donkies.

All good land belonged to the Jews and all the industries and trade were controlled by them. There were numerous large orange gardens in Palestine some of them belonging to Arabs, and oranges in large quantities were exported in normal times. Since the export of the oranges had stopped for want of shipping accommodation during the war the fruits were being wasted in the country. Gardens were full of ripe oranges, but nobody plucked them. When over-ripe they dropped on the ground in large numbers and decayed. Once our men were passing by a garden when they found so many oranges on the ground. They entered the garden quickly, picked up a few, and ran back at the sight of a gardener, who ran after them shouting, 'Rafiq' Rafiq' (meaning comrade). When our men stopped the gardener begged of them to pick some more, even truck loads of them, and also offered to pay a little for it.

There are huge reserviors at Haifa to store large quantities of petrol. These are connected by means of a line to the oil wells at Bahrain in Saudi Arabia. Tel-Aviv like Haifa was entirely a new city. It did not exist in 1908, although two years previously a group of Jaffa Jews had borrowed from the Jewish National Fund 2.00,000 gold francs and bought several thousand square meters of sand dunes. The first house was built in 1909, but in 1941 Tel-Aviv with a population of nearly 200,000 was the slickest, most modern, most un-Middle Eastern town of the Middle East. Its municipal Corporation claimed that Tel-Aviv had more wash basins and porcelain baths than any other town in the Middle East.

Tel-Aviv started as an all Jewish Metropolis-Hitlers anti-Jewish drive made it German, and the German invasion of Poland drove to Tel-Aviv great flocks of non-Semitic Poles, slaves. The army kept Tel-Avivs open air coffee houses, and its clean Mediterranean beach pretty full. Here people were invited to girl parties, like tea or other parties. I was once invited to one such party by a Jewish Car dealer from whom I had purchased a car for the unit a few days earlier, which however I had no time to attend. According to a medical report published in those days 70 percent of grown up girls in Schools and other educational institutions were suffering from venereal diseases !

After all this period of rest and sight seeing we were once again ready for action. On receipt of long awaited orders, we left for Damascus the Capital of Syria by match route, where fighting was in progress between our troops and the Vichy French. Although our troops had made good progress in the beginning, they had suffered heavily during fighting around Damascus. Further progress was arrested and both sides occupied defensive positions to enable them to reorganise. A mountain Battery which could go close to the enemy position was badly wanted.

At the end of our first day's journey a British Lieut. Colonel so far unknown to us, came to visit us. He told us that we were soon going to be a part of a Mountain Regiment, which he was going to command. The Regiment was to consist of three Mountain Batteries of the Royal Artillery in addition to ours. He caught sight of my car and asked me how I managed to get it when he had failed to get one. He advised me not to take the car to the front, but to leave it with him. I ignored the advice. I, however, lost the car the next day as the jewish driver fled with it on knowing that we were going for action.

We passed through Tiberious, where we made a short halt just outside the town. Practice in ball-room dancing was being held on the first floor of one of the buildings. A girl school was close at hand where girls were collected, on seeing us some teenagers came running to where we were sitting. We offered them cold drinks, which they gladly accepted. One of them asked me which part of the world we had come from. When I said India, she said she knew a lot about India. I asked her what did she knew and she said she knew that in India there were two communities, Hindus and Mohammedans, who had nothing else to do but to fight each other. I asked her how she came to know about this, she said they were taught this in the School. It was given in their books ! I told them that that was not quite true and whatever differences the two communities had were the result of the British policy in India. When I mentioned that the Battery I was commanding was composed fifty percent of Hindus and fifty percent Mohammedans, they were very surprised.

One day after going through the daily after-the-march routine I was sitting under a tree with other officers, when I saw the whole of the Battery marching towards us under the Senior, Junior Commissioned Officer. They fell in a line some distance in front of me and the senior Junior Commissioned Officer came forward and congratulated me on behalf of the Battery on my promotion to the rank of Lt. Colonel. I was quite surprised, as I had no knowledge of it. One JCO, Jemadar Sanobar Khan, had received a letter from his brother Capt. Morrawat Khan from India giving this information.

A few days later I received a few congratulatory cables and letters from my friends and well-wishers in India, and long after that the official letter arrived informing me about the accelerated promotion given to me. General Scott also wrote to congratulate me, but with this letter there was another letter of a prior date which I happened to open first. In that letter he had expressed his annoyance over what I had written in one of my accounts about the withdrawal of SSOs and the events leading to it. His main objection was that the SSOs had no knowledge of what had been written about them in their absence and had no opportunity to defend themselves. But when I explained to him that I had not written a word more than what I had told or written to the concerned authorities in the Middle East, who had not removed the SSOs without giving them a full opportunity to defend themselves, he wrote another letter very different in tone.

All the three letters are reproduced below :—

13th May 1941.

My dear Bhagwan Singh,

Reference your report on the operation before Cheren and Asmara.

I cannot say how sorry I am that you spoilt the whole thing by making ill bred and spiteful remarks about your late SSOs. You were unable even to avoid such remarks in respect of the last SSO who on your own showing avoided friction by sitting back and leaving the Battery to run itself.

Such remarks as you made are, in my opinion, not such as a gentleman would have allowed himself to speak let alone write. A gentleman also would have remembered that the other man would not know what had been written and so would have no opportunity to defend himself.

I myself have always advocated SSOs well junior in rank to the COs of our Units and that they should be appointed for only three months, that is until the COs had had time to pick up Indian Army administration ways, but for no longer. So I am no advocate of SSOs, but fairness is fairness.

Yours sincerely,
H.L. Scott.

24th June 1941

My dear Bhagwan Singh,

His Highness the Maharaja Bahadur has been pleased to promote you to the rank of Lieut. Col. with effect from the 3rd April 1941 "in recognition of excellent services rendered in the Field." His Highness has commanded that the arrears of pay so become due to you shall be drawn and credited to you.

Very hearty congratulations to you on this well deserved and high honour, and very hearty congratulations to all ranks of your battery who have helped you to deserve this honour by their efficiency and devotion to duty.

We have not heard of your doings for a long time and do not know where the Battery is serving now, but wherever you are we all wish you good fortune and more honour.

Yours sincerely,
H.L. Scott.

———

Srinagar
22nd July 1941

My dear Bhagwan Singh,

Many thanks for your letter of the 9th instant, I am sorry I wrote you so strongly about your remarks regarding your late SSOs. Had I known then what I have learnt since I would have appreciated your feelings better and have written less strongly. Even if the remarks had been in a separate report on the subject of SSO they would not have struck me as so ill judged. I have always thought and reported that SSOs (Senior Special Service Officers) are a very great mistake. A good Commander is good and a bad Commander bad, but two Commanders whether individually good or bad are very very bad.

Well let's now drop the unpleasant matter. You and your battery have been earning fresh laurels and we are all very proud of you, even the Kashmiri Pandit Clerks of Kashmir swagger a bit more in your reflected glory. They feel that they also did some part of it in some obscure way. We all hope you (the battery) have scooped in some more honours. I wish some of our other troops could get your chances. I am sure all would do well.

As his telegram will have told you His Highness is very pleased with your recent doing and very proud too.

I do not know that there is much news to give you about the State. Things go pretty much as usual. I visited the 2nd Battery and the 7th Infantry the other day and had very good reports from their General Officers Commanding, equally good reports of the 2 Rifles and 4 Infantry. Your friends the SSOs are gradually being eliminated from all our troops.

With best wishes to you and all the officers and men.

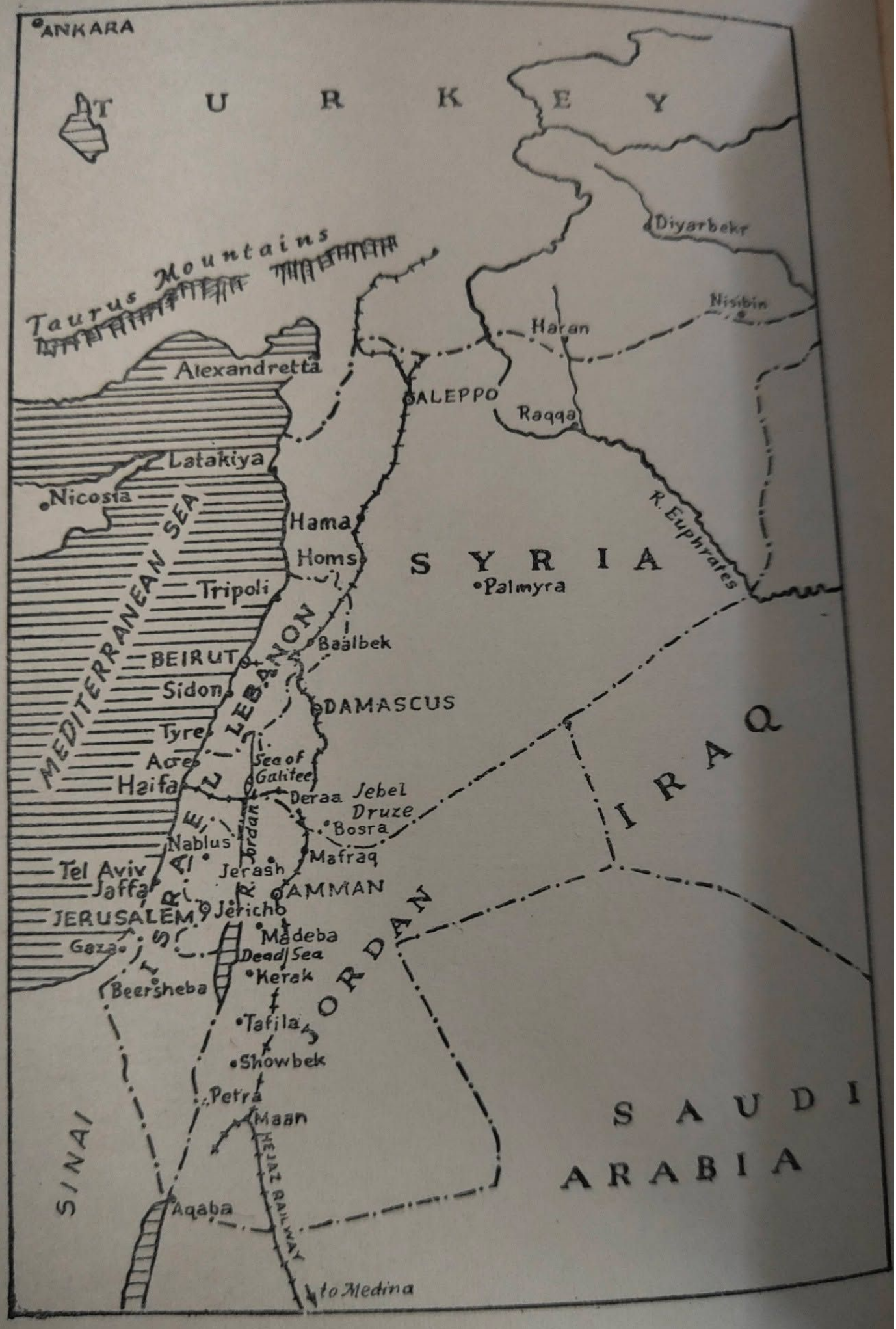
Yours sincerely,
H.L. Scott.

P.S.

(1) H.H. has sanctioned the replacement of Syces by Drivers additional to W.E. Private servants by soldiers batsman within W.E. Enrolment of mess servants and Regt. Private followers.

(2) Would you please let me know for the information of Kashmir War Comforts Society what type of comforts (Food, Clothes, games, newspaper etc) the Battery likes and approximately how much at what intervals of time.

(Note: His Highness' telegram mentioned in the above letter was in fact never received by me.)


ANKARA
TURKEY
Taurus Mountains
Diyarbekr
Nisibin
Haran
Alexandretta
ALEPPO
Raqqa
Latakiya
Nicosia
MEDITERRANEAN SEA
Hama
Homs
SYRIA
R. Euphrates
Palmyra
Tripoli
LEBANON
Baalbek
BEIRUT
Sidon
DAMASCUS
Tyre
Acre
Haifa
Sea of Galilee
Deraa
Jebel Druze
Bosra
IRAQ
Nablus
Jordan
Mafraq
Tel Aviv
Jaffa
Jerash
AMMAN
JERUSALEM
Jericho
Madeba
Gaza
Dead Sea
Kerak
Beersheba
Tafila
JORDAN
Showbek
Petra
Maan
SAUDI ARABIA
SINAI
Aqaba
HEJAZ RAILWAY
to Medina

CHAPTER XIII

THE SYRIAN CAMPAIGN

On reaching Damascus, which now was in our hands except the hills around it, we learnt many stories of hard fighting for the city. While we came to know of some acts of gallantry on the part of our troops, we also heard of some severe reverses and of the capture of one complete Indian Infantry Brigade by the enemy. The general impression was that the French were much better fighters than the Italians. All this we came to know unofficially from troops who took part in the operations. Officially every thing was a dead secret.

The enemy was holding commanding features on both sides of the Damascus-Beruit road about ten miles North-West of Damascus. Our main forces were near about Damascus with some troops about seven miles to the West of it. The ground between our main forces and the enemy was all open and was often shelled by the enemy. Any movement over this ground, particularly along the road, was an invitation to danger. Convoys carrying supplies to our forward troops always moved during the night.

Our Battery was placed under the command of a British Infantry Brigade. My first meeting with the commander of this Brigade was not very pleasant, through no direct fault of any of us. Too much of secrecy was again the cause of it. I was told very roughly to go to a certain area and see the Brigade Commander for instructions. I had no knowledge of the dispositions of the enemy and our own troops, so I went to the place roughly pointed out to me and found a British sentry on the roadside. I asked him the way to the Brigade Headquarters and he showed it to me. On seeing my truck approaching from the direction of the enemy, raising clouds of dust and thereby disclosing the position of the Bde. HQ, a well built fellow came out of the cover and yelled and shouted. As my truck drew near and he found that the defaulter was an Indian the intensity of his yells increased. What names he called me I could not hear on account of the sound of the engine of my truck, but when our truck stopped and he ran upto us he was extremely furious. We were both wearing steel helmets and no badges of ranks, so were unable to recognise each other, but I had no doubt by then that he was the Brigade Commander (Brigadier C.E.N. Lomax C.B E.D.S.O., M.C.) himself. When I introduced myself to him, he changed his tone and told me how wrong I was to have come like that I told him how the sentry sent me there

and the unpleasant talk was dropped. He then took me to his office where we talked business. It was decided that I should go and meet the Officer Commanding one of his forward Battalions holding the out-post positions, and the only way to go there was to follow the convoy which was to leave after dark. Taking necessary staff with me in my truck I followed the convoy when it left. The night was very dark and we were for obvious reasons driving with lights off. The only way to keep touch was to closely follow the vehicle just in front and not let it go out of sight. We had gone a short distance when a fast vehicle from behind overtook our truck and placed itself just in front of us. We closely followed this vehicle for some time, then it drove to a side and halted. We found that we were out of touch with the convoy. A little further we found some white stones placed across the road in a line, indicating that the road was closed. Our driver slowed down but was about to go over the stones when I stopped him. The other vehicle which was now following us, finding us halted in the middle of the road, attempted to pass us from the left. As it went off the metalled road and was just in line with our vehicle, something exploded with a tremendous bang. We jumped out of our vehicle and ran in different directions, considering it to be a shell from an enemy gun who we thought must have registered this point. We expected some more shells to follow but nothing happened for some time. Extricating myself from the barbed wire fence which I had run into, I returned to my vehicle to find that one of its tyres and two tyres of other vehicle were torn, and the engine of the other vehicle had been damaged. Its driver was also badly hurt.

What had happened was that one of our own mines had burst, showing once again how important it is to inform troops about the positions of their own mine fields Where to go now? We had not the slightest idea, nor could we stay where we were as this could not have been very far from enemy positions. I told the driver to put the vehicle in order again and keep it ready while we went to and fro to find some clue as to the way we should go. Going back some distance, we found some vehicle track marks turning towards the high grounds said to be occupied by our forward troops. We followed them and soon reached the Battalion Head Quarters. Here the troops were occasionally subjected to enemy shelling, but they had built good covers and trenches.

I met the Officer Commanding the Battalion who tried to put me in the battle picture. A drawn attack on the enemy positions was under contemplation. For this I wanted complete information about the dispositions of the enemy and the ground in front, but inspite of having been at that position for quite a number of days, this Battalion had not considered it necessary to send patrols far enough to get the necessary information. I therefore decided to go

out for personal reconnaissance, without which I could not feel satisfied.

On a moonlit night, accompanied by one officer and a Non Commissioned Officer of my staff and escorted by a platoon of British Infancty, I left for reconnaissance of the no man's land between the opposing forces. We had gone a short distance when the Commander of the platoon, a young Second Lieutenant, turned round and whispered "How far would you like to go sir.". I whispered "Further on!" Having gone some more distance, he whispered again "Will that do sir. We are almost on top of the enemy now!" But I had not been able to see much of the enemy yet so I signalled him further with my hand. We went so close to the enemy that I could make out their trenches on the forward sloped of the hills just in front of us. Having thus had a thorough look at the enemy positions and the ground, we returned to the Battalion Headquarters and thence to our camp near Damascus, where we awaited further orders.

One day I had gone to Damascus with Captain Ahsan Ali to see the town. I happened to pass by a building where the Commanding Royal Artillery had his office. I called on him. He was surprised to find me there. He asked me if I had received a 'Top Secret' letter sent by him through the MCDR. I replied in the negative. "Well" he said "you better go back to your camp and see the letter. You are coming into action tonight."

I immediately left his office and hurried back to our camp. I was driving my car pretty fast when one of its front tyres burst, and inspite of my best efforts to control the steering the car went off the road and then overturned into a ditch. We had our heads down and legs up, with petrol leaking over us. With some difficulty we came out of the car, and leaving Captain Ashan Ali to look after the vehicle I myself went to our camp on the first Army vehicle that passed that way.

The Motor Cycle Despatch Rider (MCDR) had delivered the 'Top Secret' letter to my second-in-command Captain Amar Nath Lakhanpal, who had already warned the Battery and had issued necessary instructions. Relieved of this worry I told the officers about our accident and arranged for a vehicle to go and tow the car to the camp.

In the evening we left for action. our rendezvous in the rear of the forward Infantry Battalion was about fifteen miles by road and about four miles across country. For moving across country we had to go past the enemy positions on our flank. We decided to take the risk. The move was as silent as could be expected of a well trained and disciplined unit, and we reached our rendezvous unnoticed by the enemy. We however had an anxious moment en route. We were nearing a mountain pass when we saw some

scattered men and animals approaching us from the direction of the enemy. A very nasty situation for a Mountain Battery to face on their march up hill, with no Infantry detachments to escort it. I ordered the Light Machine Guns and the few riflemen we had, to come into action. When we were thus preparing to meet the intruders, the party approached. Luckily our men, like the highly trained troops that they were, withheld their fire until the party came quite close to them. These were civilian travellers and not the enemy. Absence of panic and good control alone saved the lives of these people and probably our own, as opening of fire so close to the enemy positions would surely have been followed by fighting which would have resulted in disaster for us under the circumstances.

I met the Battalion commander at the rendezvous who explained to me the latest situation. The 16th British Infantry Brigade was going to attack at dawn on a two Battalion front, with our Battery under the command of the left forward Battalion (The 2nd Battalion the Kings Own Regiment). To maintain secrecy Artillery was not to open fire until the capture of the first objective.

All the reconnaissance made by us on a previous night proved in vain, as our advance took place in a different direction. The Infantry advanced upto the starting line closely followed by our Battery and the attack started at Zero hour without Artillery support. We waited for the Capture of the first objective but that was not to be.

Both the forward companies of the Battalion were under the command of; had attacked one and the same objective instead of the two different ones allotted to them, owing to some mistake in map reading on the part of one of the company commanders, and were subjected to heavy flanking fire from the unattacked objective. Not too long after the attack commenced the Battalion was completely held up. There was no touch between the forward companies and the Battalion HQ. The Battalion commander came to me and asked for help. I expressed my inability to do anything until day break, as Artillery in order to be able to fire at night must make certain necessary preparations before nightfall which we did not have the opportunity to do.

The guns had advanced to about one thousand yards from the enemy position, and to be able to start shooting as early as possible after first light we brought them into action on a reverse slope, the only place suitable for the purpose. We were taking all the necessary precautions to conceal ourselves and were bringing the animals in batches of three at a time, but the Officer Commanding Battalions, who had probably seen a Mountain Battery coming into action for the first time (as there were no Mountain Batteries in the British Army), raised all sorts of absurd objections.

The most interesting of all was his suggestion for moving No.4 gun to some other position as he wanted to have his BN HQ there. This position he thought was concealed and safe. I explained to him the difficulties this involved and after some discussion he agreed to move his HQ to some other place.

The next moment I saw some British soldiers building a 'Sangar' just close to No.4 gun, well within its arc of traverse. This was meant to be the Battalion Head Quarters. I requested the OC Battalion to have his HQ well away from the guns, but he thought I was not cooperating with him and stuck to the place. I went out to select my Observation Post and found a good one not very far from the gun position. I knew what sort of place the Battalion Commander liked for his Head Quarters. A little away from my OP I found a dip behind a big rock, not very suitable for observation but absolutely safe from shells and bullets. I returned to the gun position to tell the Battalion Commander that I had selected a good place for his Head Quarters, but he thought it was an attempt on my part to get rid of him. I asked him to just have a look at it and returned if he disapproved of it. He reluctantly sent his second-in-command with me to have a look. The position was so liked by the second-in-command and later by the commander himself that both thanked me repeatedly for this kindness. During the operations I often visited the Commanding Officer at his HQ. He seemed to be quite happy as far as his safety was concerned and he thanked me each time I went.

Meanwhile the battle progressed and the enemy definitely had the upper hand. The Bn. Commander was completely out of touch with his forward Companies and so with the situation in front. I engaged targets from my OP on my own initiative from time to time.

Throughout the Eriteran operations the GOC 5th Indian Division always had his battle HQ with the foremost troops. He and the Brigade Commanders were always available near about our OP and were always in full control of the situation, but here nobody seemed to be taking the fighting seriously. The Battalion Commander controlled the operations from his HQ in a ditch and the Brigade and the Division commanders were perhaps too busy in the rear to even visit the front. The situation remained so obscure that the dispositions and activities of our own troops, let alone of the enemy, were not known to us. Once I saw a large tank moving on a bit of open ground behind the enemy's foremost positions. It offered an excellent target, but I wanted to be sure that it was not ours. I telephoned the Battalion Headquarters to find out but they had no idea, so I left it alone.

The Battalion commander somehow learnt that his forward companies had suffered about 40 per cent casualties and were in

bad need of help. He came to me and asked if I could send a forward Observation Officer to one of the forward companies, I asked him where the company was. He started drawing a sketch on the ground behind a cover with his stick. I asked him to come up a little and point it out to me on the ground, but he thought it was unsafe to do so. He went on with his sketch and pointed out on it where his company was likely to be. To send a Forward Observing Officer with so scant information and in so obscure a situation was against the training manuals, but taking into account the gravity of the situation and the helplessness of the Battalion Commander I agreed to do so.

I knew any officer detailed as Forward Observing Officer under those circumstances had good reasons to try and put off going into the blue like that without sufficient information, but Lt. Madan Lal (later Major) whom I detailed for the purpose proceeded without showing any signs of reluctance. Not only did he lead his party safely over open ground swept by enemy Machine Gun fire but he also made contact with the Company Commander and conducted very accurate shooting on different targets destroying enemy mortars and Machine Guns, thus enabling our forward troops to keep their hold on whatever little ground they had gained. For this act of gallantry and devotion to duty in the face of grave danger I recommended him for the award of Military Cross, which he received in due course.

From my Observation Post too I had a chance of engaging different types of targets, such as concentration of enemy tanks, guns and Medium Machine Guns, which frustrated all attempts on the part of the enemy to surround us or drive us away. Several enemy Infantry groups were engaged while rushing to occupy commanding features, which we had the sense to register previously. We could see them advancing, before our shells burst over their heads, then lying down as they heard the sound of the approaching shells, then some running for cover some dropping dead, some limping and some rolling down the slopes. It was a pitiable sight. Left to my conscience I would have liked to stop shooting them, but duty bound as I was I carried on. What surprised me most during all this shooting was a solitary peasant in the enemy area, who continued to plough his land undeterred by what was happening around him. I tried to save him as much as possible, but an odd shell did occasionally help him in ploughing his land !

By then the enemy knew fully well who was coming in their way. Incessant shooting on our part had exposed our position, my OP was machine gunned, but that was not enough to prevent us from carrying our relentless shooting. Early next morning, when I was at the gun position, an enemy shell burst behind our guns and then another in front. Hundreds of others followed. Soon the gun position and the wagon line, where our animals were concealed if three hundred animals could be concealed at

all—were under heavy bombardment. Luckily the gun position was on a reverse slope which could be easily hit. It was only the splinters and the stones put into flight by the shell burst on the ground that disturbed us slightly. But pandomonium had prevailed in the wagon line. One horse received a direct hit and was blown into pieces, while the reins remained held by the horse holder.

Although the Wagon line was changed, about twenty animals were killed and about seventy injured. Many animals broke loose and fled to our last camp. Driver Devi Dayal lost his arm, but refused to be evacuated. Profusely bleeding he held his animal with the other hand and pleaded that he was quite fit for duty. This was a fine example of devotion to duty. I recommended him for an award of Indian Distinguished Service Medal (I.D.S.M.) which he received in due course, Two drivers were killed and a few wounded. All this did not deter us from carrying on our shooting effectively, and our Division Commander Major General J.F. Evetts C.B., C.B.E., D.S.O., M.C. later commended our this action in a telegram to the C-in-C Middle East Force.

Inspite of our best efforts, the pressure of the enemy who was far superior to us in numbers increased every moment. Reinforcements were demanded but were not available. The Battalion Commander while telling me this broke into tears. I did my best to console him. We were told to fight to the last man and last round. An Additional Battery of Australian Artillery was however allotted to us for support. It was a 25 Pounder Battery which was already in action somewhere in the rear. One of its officers detailed as Forward Observing Officer arrived in the front, laying a telephone wire and reported to the Battalion Commander for instructions. The latter told him to go forward, get in touch with one of the forward companies and render necessary support. But the officer was very clever, he told the Battalion Commander that there was no use having two forward Observing Officers in front. He would lay his telephone line to the Jammu and Kashmir Battery Forward Observing Officer, who could then easily conduct shooting by both the Batteries. The Battalion commander did not find anything wrong with the suggestion. He spoke to me over the telephone and asked me to instruct my Forward Observing Officer accordingly.

I told him that he had been deceived. Even if they connected our Forward Observing Officer to that Battery by a telephone line, he would not be able to conduct and observe shooting of more than one battery at a time, and the arrangement suggested was not better than having only one Battery in action. The other Battery was therefore a complete waste. I suggested that the other officer must have a separate Forward Observation Post in front if his Battery was to be made full use of. The Battalion Commander agreed and told the officer accordingly. The officer disappeared and never went to

the front, but to impress his Battery commander he established his Forward Observation Post somewhere in our rear and conducted some shooting at random

The enemy pressure continued to increase. Their plan seemed to be encircle us. We were almost surrounded from three sides. Any reinforcements were out of question. We prepared for the worst and continued fighting to the best of our ability. When all hope was lost and severe fighting and incessant shooting from both sides was in progress, we received the happy news that an armistice had been signed between the Vichy French and the British Governments and both sides would 'cease fire' at 0001 hrs. the same night. The firing continued till midnight, but with reduced intensity. The french vacated their forward positions even earlier. After the 'cease fire' I went to the Battalion Headquarters to find out what to do next. There was nobody there. The Battalion Headquarters had been hurriedly moved to the vacated enemy positions to give the impression that they had succeeded in capturing these before the 'cease fire'.

The General Officer Commanding arrived next morning. He was very pleased to find that the objectives had been captured. The General, the Commanding Royal Artillery and the Brigade Commander congratulated me and all ranks of the Battery for having saved the lives of the Brigade inspite of ourselves being under heavy fire. The Commanding Officer of the Infantry Battalion sent his Adjutant to me to tell that he and all ranks of the Battalion were full of praise for the Battery and were very thankful to them.

The General Officer Commanding wrote a letter to His Highness which was later published in the Jammu and Kashmir information April 1944 and is reproduced below :—

"The following letter dated 2nd August 1944 addressed to His Highness the Maharaja Bahadur by General J.F. Evetts, E.B., C.B.E.D.S.O., M.C., Commander, 6th Division Middle East Forces of which the Jammu & Kashmir Battery formed a Unit, described the gallant part played by the men of this Unit in the attack on Jabal Mazar ten miles west of Damascus :—

"I have at present the honour of having the Jammu and Kashmir Battery under my command and have received permission to write direct to you to express my admiration of its efficiency and keenness.

The Battery came under my command a few days before my attack on the Jabal Mazar, ten miles west of Damuscus.

This attack took place on the 10th and 11th July and was one of the several operations which culminated in the final defeat of Vichy Forces.

Your Battery was placed under the command of 16th Infantry Brigade under Brigadier C.E.N. Lomax, C.B.E., D.S.O., M.C., with the particular task of supporting the advance of the 2nd Battalion—the Kings own Royal Regiment.

Throughout the action the Battery worked with outstanding coolness.

It never failed to give the closet support to the Infantry who are full of praise of its conduct.

The position of the mule lines was unfortunately seen by hostile aircraft and the lines were severely shelled.

I regret the Battery lost two other Ranks killed, seven other ranks wounded, and twenty mules from this cause.

The acction of the drivers during the trying period was almost praiseworthy.

The guns which were not 200 yards away, were served without a break throughout the bombardment.

I would also mention the action of the forward observation party under Lt. Madan Lal which inspite of difficulty arising from the terrian, provided continuous observation throughout the hours of day light.

I have recommended this officer for the Military cross.

I visited the Battery in its action stations on the day following the battle.

I was impressed by the smartness and soldierly bearing of all ranks although still surrounded by the debris of the battle.

They set an example to the whole Division.

It is unnescessary for me to state that a Unit with such a standard must be commanded by an unusually good Officer. Lt. Col. Bhagwan Singh, besides being an exceptionally charming Officer, is in my opinion an excellent Commander from whom one can expect the closest co-operation in the most trying circumstances."

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Chapter XIV

THE PEACETIME ATMOSPHERE

What a sudden change the cease fire brought for us. Not long ago we were fighting what I call our toughest battle of the war. For four nights and three days continuously we had been fighting a heavy and unfavourable battle, which gave us several anxious moments. We had missed our sleep, regular meals, tea, baths, and even calls for nature for days, and our beards had considerably grown. But now all was calm and quiet. We had no longer to whisper or signal to each other. We could shout and laugh.

For the first time in the war, we collected in a large group at the Battery position for a snapshot, and then moved about freely. In the afternoon we returned to Damascus whence we moved to Zhale about thirty miles to the east. Here we stayed for some time spending most of our time in looking after about seventy of our animals wounded in action.

I was very bitter about a case of indiscipline that had taken place during the operations. A British L/Corporal and three British drivers attached to us for duty had refused to drive their vehicles, carrying the much needed ammunition and hot tea for men during the battle, further than a safe point fixed by them, as a couple of shells had landed here and there. When ordered by our Quarter Master Havildar who was accompanying them to proceed, they had left their vehicles and fled.

I did not want this incident to pass unnoticed, and ordered a summary of evidence to be prepared. The Commanding Officer of their permanent unit objected to it and approached the Commanding Royal Artillery for having the matter hushed up. But I insisted on taking proper disciplinary action as I thought it was a very bad example for anybody to set, much less the British troops. The Summary of Evidence was taken in hand by my second-in-command, who approached me before its conclusion twice and requested me to pardon the accused as they had promised that they would not repeat the blunder. He also told me how obediently and faithfully those British drivers had otherwise been dishcharging their duties all along since their attachment with us. I told them to be extremely careful in future and dropped the proceedings.

General (later Field Marshal) Sir Claude Auchinleck Commander-in-Chief Middle East, paid us a visit at this camp. He had given us 5.30 p.m., as time for visiting our unit. The Battery fell

in for his inspection but he did not arrive. I waited until 6 p.m., and then dismissed the unit.

I was undoing my "putties", when the Commander-in-Chief came straight into the Verandah outside my room. I expressed my regret at having just then dismissed the Battery, but as was expected from the great General he said it was not my fault but his. He said he was unable to come earlier due to unavoidable transport difficulties. He jocularly asked me how many SSO's I had. When I said none, he asked me if I was happy. I replied in the affirmative and he said he was happy too.

He told me how pleased he was with the excellent work done by the Battery during the operations, and congratulated me for it. Then he talked about the country around us and said that it very much resembled Kashmir. He also broke the news to us that His Highness Maharaja Hari Singhji of Jammu and Kashmir was coming on a visit to the Middle East. Then he went around the unit and talked to the men who were taking their meals, and saw the wounded animals under the care of Jemadar Adavappa of the Royal Indian Army Veterinary Corps attached to us, who was taking great pains in treating them without caring for his own comfort, I had recommended him for an award of the Indian Distinguished Service Medal but he was 'mentioned in Despatches'.

A Brigadier Commanding a British Brigade, who had been with the Indian Army in India, happened to visit us here once. He went round the troops kitchen where rice was being cooked. He told me how much he liked the Indian food and asked me if I could send a pair of cooks to cook Indian meals for their officers mess once. We sent the cooks and the Indian rations to their officers mess. The cooks told us afterwards how the officers asked for more and more food and how the mess sergeant had reserved some for himself with strict instructions not to serve that to the officers in any case.

The residents of Zahle and round about did not take long to fraternise with us. French residents and locals often attended our dramatic shows, and folk dances. The women specially liked the later. Some French girls belonging to well-to-do families sometimes joined our 'Bhangra' dance which they very much liked. From here we sent parties to visit towns and places of importance. Bes des these social recreational functions due attention was paid to the training side. Opportunities for training in conjuction with other troops were fully availed of.

At the request of the Commander of one British Infantry Brigade we gave them a demonstration of Infantry-Artillery co-operation. About three hundred British Officers and other ranks attended. In a brief speech before starting the practical part of the demonstration I explained to them what should and what

should not be done both by the Infantry and the Artillery, with particular reference to the mistakes often made by the former while working in co-operation with the later. It was pointed out and demonstrated that whenever Artillery failed to give proper support to the Infantry, in nine cases out of ten the fault lay with the Infantry and not with Artillery. This demonstration was a great success. Demands for similar demonstrations came from other Brigades which could not be met for want of time. Tactical Exercises with troops were also carried during this period, but here we were found wanting in many respects, as is often the case in peace time exercises. We were often late in opening fire, because being a mountain Battery (an animal unit) we could not keep pace with the mechanised units nor could we keep touch with the commanders of the units we supported. They moved about in trucks or Bren carriers, while we bumped along on horse backs. Luckily the units we supported in actual operations were always too willing to provide us with any numbers of vehicles we demanded, even at their own inconvenience, but this was not the case with the peace time exercises.

However realistic and near-the-service-conditions situations you may create in peace time, they can never be realistic enough to represent active service conditions. Even the new war inoculation system of training, though quite good, is not near enough the service conditions to represent them. Many peace time exercises fail not because the commanders adopt wrong methods, but because they fail to read the Directors mind. 'Eye wash' and memorisation of a few beautiful sentences from Training Manuals may produce better results in peace time exercises than courage and initiative, which count much in war.

Training Manuals are very thoughtfully and carefully written by experts and are meant to be useful guides, which they no doubt are if correctly interpreted with commonsense, but to think as some people do that they contain specific formulae, rigid application whereof could win wars, is a sheer mistake. The use of newly invented secret weapons and improved armament in every new war necessitates new methods for countering them, which the training manuals existing at the time do not contain. All training manuals are therefore rendered out of date as soon as a war breaks out, and have to be rewritten provisonally in haste during the war and finally after it. These new manuals then form the basis of training for the next war and again become out of date and are rewritten before their usefulness is tested in the next war, and so on.

The principles of war, however, remain the same. It is the knowledge of these unchanging principles of war and their correct application that really matters in war. Courage and commensense are the essential qualities which one must possess, alone or in

addition to any others. I may be wrong, but I firmly believe that a civilian with courage and commonsense can handle a Military situation in war better than a topping staff college graduate devoid of these two necessary qualities. Even obviously wrong, but quick and bold, action in war may often prove more successful than a well thought out, correct, but belated and cowardly action.

Commonsense could probably be developed in anybody with proper education and training, but whether courage could be inculcated and developed in those who do not originally possess it is a doubtful proposition. In any case a non-fighting race, community or nation would need generations to become a fighting one. This was the reason why the British did not like to abolish the distinction between the fighting and non-fighting races for enlistment in the Army. Morale can be raised by certain means, but there is a difference between courage and morale. At the end of the last war when Sir Winston Churchil was worried about the growing strength of the war time Indian Army, which had then expanded to about two millions, he issued orders for its immediate reduction but laid stress on preserving its quality by retaining the fighting classes only.

We passed our time nicely at Zahle and the authorities concerned liked us and looked after us very well. We had so great a reputation and were so much in esteem that it was enough to belong to the J & K Mountain Battery to get preferential treatment.

I was again without a car, so I asked for one. Although no Commanding Officer of any other units, let alone of a Mountain Batterry, had cars, a new V8 staff car was immediately supplied to me. There was no "returned with the remarks"; anything we asked for was immediately done. Our Commanding Royal Artillery was an extremely nice person and we had great confidence in each other.

I do not remember if we ever disagreed with each other except on one occasion when he set aside the conviction and acquitted a farrier Naik of our Battery, whom I had tried by a summary court Martial for having prevented the drivers from taking their animals back to where they had fled from on account of heavy bombardment. The Naiks defence was that he stopped the drivers under orders of a certain British Officer, whose name and rank he did not know, but whom he could recognise. The Commanding Royal Artillery knew that British Officer was none other than he himself. Even in this case the CRA personally came to express his regret for having to disagree with me.

While things were proceeding so smoothly at Zahle, the 26th Mountain Regiment was coming into being back in Palestine at El-Lajjun, where we had left our first reinforcements consisting of one officer, about thirty men and about the same number of animals. Lt. Col. J.C. Allardyce, the commander of the newly

formed regiment, transferred all our mules to the other Batteries of the Regiment and ordered all our spare stores to be returned to the ordnance Depot. When Capt. Mohd. Din, our Officer Incharge First Reinforcements, expressed his inability to carry out those orders without first getting my permission he was threatened by a trial by a Court Martial.

I went to the Commanding Royal Artillery and complained about the regimental commanders attitude. The CRA wrote him a strong letter demanding the return of all animals and stores to us immediately.

The Regimental Commander sent me a message informing me that he was visiting us and would like to discuss the matter with me. I mentioned this to the CRA who asked me to send the Regimental Commander to him when he arrived. The Regimental Commander came and had much to say against our officer I/c who showed reluctance in the matter of returning the spare stores to the ordnance. I explained to him what difficulties we had in the past in getting supplies of spare parts and other articles of equipment he wanted us to return, and how by experience we had found it extremely necessary to keep a few essential things always in reserve.

Actually he knew all this and wanted us to return the stores to the ordnance only to be issued to other Batteries of the Regiment, who were finding it difficult to get their supplies of some of those spare parts and equipment. I went on protesting against this procedure and he went on insisting, but before anything could be settled I told him that the Commanding Royal Artillery wanted to see him. He went to the Commanding Royal Artillery and returned to discuss with me again, but this time his tone was different. He said he would get better mules from the Remount Depot, and promised to have the stores replaced. He however asked me to send a special report on Captain Mohammad Din twice a week as by disobeying his orders the officer had laid himself open to doubt whether he was fit to be retained.

I personally thought that the officer was not to be blamed. The Regiment was just then coming into being, the Battery had not yet formed a part of it or at least not joined it, there was no hurry in transferring our animals and stores to other Batteries, even if it was otherwise necessary. In any case there was no reason why the orders should not have come through me. I told him that I knew the officer very well and that in having pointed out that it was improper for him to carry out those orders unless they came through me, he had only done his duty. There was therefore, nothing wrong with the officer and no special report was therefore necessary. The matter ended there and the Regimental Commander returned to Palestine.

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Chapter XV

TRAINING FOR COMBINED OPERATIONS

After staying for some time more in Syria we received orders to move to Kabrit, a lake on the Suez Canal about eighty miles from Cairo, for training in combined operations so that we could take our place in the force that was getting ready to land somewhere (in Sicily and Italy as we later came to know).

We sent our animals back to El-lajjun, while the Battery proceeded to Kabrit in Egypt. We passed through a transit camp in Palestine, where all Indian ranks invited us to tea, and presented me with an addresss of welcome the text whereof was approved by their British Commanding Officer. In that address, apart from paying a tribute to the Battery for their wonderful achievements in different operations in the Middle East, they had paid a very high tribute to me and compared me to Napoleon! They had expressed their pride at the fact that a completely Indian unit, the only one of its kind, had proved so outstanding and acquitted itself so well in the war. In a brief speech I thanked all ranks for the honour they had done to us, and for the high tribute paid to us although we did not deserve even a fraction of it. I told them how conscious we were of the fact that being the first and the only unit completely Indian, we were more responsible than anybody else to uphold the traditional prestige and honour of our great country. We were glad to have been able to contribute a little to that end already, and I assured them that we would not be found wanting in any future operations.

I had just finished my speech when Colonel Alredice suddenly appeared and expressed his surprise at our move. He said he knew nothing about it, and added that he would try to get us back soon, for which however we were not very keen. He again advised me to leave my car behind (with him of course) as he thought it would not stand the long journey through the Sainai desert. Once again I ignored his advice and took the car with me. It went through the desert all right over the sandy, undulated and rough road, if it could be called a road at all. At Kabrit we were put through a course in Combined Operations. All ranks had to learn rowing of boats. Bringing guns into action from the Beach landing craft (B.L.C.) in support of the Infantry attempting a landing on the enemy Beaches was the main thing to practice. Mountain guns had never been used on this job before. The idea was to make

an experiment with these guns which could land with the Infantry and provide good close support, advancing with the Infantry if and when possible.

There were so many Infantry Brigades and Battalions training for a beach landing, and each one of them wanted to have the Battery with them, with the result that while the Infantry Battalions carried on their training turn by turn on different dates the Battery was detailed with one unit or the other every night. Finally I had to protest against this to an Infantry Brigade, with whom we were attached for the time being. The Commander of the Brigade atonce issued orders for changing the programme and wrote to me the following letter :—

Brigadier B.C. Fletcher
HQ 9th Ind. Inf. Bde.
M.E.F. 28 Oct 1941.

Dear Bhagwan singh,

Your note to the Brigade Major has just arrived. There evidently has been some mistake. You were not intended to turn out for to-nights Scheme, and J think the West Yorks must have misunderstood, thinking that they are to get a section from you for both exercises.

The B.M. has telephoned to the West Yorks saying that they cannot have you.

Yours sincerely
B.C. Fletcher.

I take my hat off for the British Commanders whom we had to deal with; they gladly modified or even cancelled their orders whenever a flaw was pointed out to them. They were not rigid but always changed according to circumstances and were on the whole reasonable and just. This applied to all British Officers in general, though they were not without their shortcomings and some of their actions were not worth emulating. For instance I was surprised to find that almost all the unit officers of the Indian Army drew free clothing from the unit stores during the war in spite of strict orders to the contrary. Our British SSOs and other officers did the same, before I took over, but I stopped this procedure in my unit inspite of the protests of the SSOs and the advice of the Regimental Commander who once tried in vain to persuade me not to buy clothing from an officers shop but draw it from the stores as others did.

Once we underdrew our weekly rations on account of some savings. The representatives of other units who also had come with indents asked our representative not to form a bad precedent but to sell the surplus rations and spend the money as we liked.

as they did. They sent our representative back to bring fresh indents, but I did not agree. Like everybody else they had their good and bad points but their behaviour and conduct on the whole was praisworthy. After all, if those who appointed the SSOs were British those who removed them were no less British.

The Battery attained a high standard of efficiency in a very short period, and it was found that these Mountain guns landing on the beaches along with the Infantry were extremely useful for supporting the Infantry in the initial stages of landing. But they could not be moved from one position to another during an advance without the mules, nor could they be pulled by means of dragropes on account of the beaches being sandy.

While support in the initial stages of beach landing could as well be given by the naval guns from the ships, it was during advance on the land after the beach landing, when the ships providing support were unable to come further, that the Artillery support was most needed. Towing of guns behind tracked Bren carriers and light tanks was given a trial but failed as the sand raised by the tracks of the vehicles covered the guns completely and rendered them unfit for immediate use. Moreover the thin wheels of the guns went so deep into the sand that it was difficult even for light tanks to pull them out without breaking their wheels. The idea of employing us on this job had therefore to be dropped.

One day we received a signal that Major General Gwatkin, Military Adviser-in-Chief Indian States Forces, was coming to visit us the next morning. Visits of Generals in the Field were not uncommon and no formalities were observed on such visits. As was usual we made no special arrangements. When the general arrived, I received him.

He looked around and asked "did you receive a signal that I was coming". I said we did. He looked around again while we walked towards my office and asked me where the troops were. I told him they were in their tents. He asked me if he could see them. I blew a whistle and they all fell in, of course not dressed for a general's inspection. He went around and talked to the men. I then took him to my office which was nothing but a covered dugout. I offered him a filled sand bag, a normal seat on field service, to sit on, which he gladly accepted.

Besides other matters, I discussed with the General the question of the status of the Indian States Forces Officers as compared to the officers of the British, Indian and the Allied Armies. The instructions received from time to time on the subject were so tactfully worded that put together they did not mean anything. These were so contradictory that if one gave us something the other withdrew it, and the net result was zero.

The general dealt with the subject as tactfully as the official

letters on the subject. He said that those were delicate matters and could not be settled by discussions between us, and added that we could safely feel that our status was the same as that of the other officers so we need not worry about such matters. I asked him if British officers were expected to salute me, and he related a story about two British Generals who were standing somewhere in Cairo, when two Australian soldiers passed by them without saluting. One of the Generals asked them "Do you know who I am ?" The Australians laughed and one said to the other "look, he does not know who he is".

I told him I was not fond of being saluted. I was rather so fed up that I had issued orders in the Battery that the men should not salute me, but I wanted to know definitely what the position was. "Legally speaking" he said, "you are not entitled to salute from a British Officer or a Soldier". "Do you think, sir, the army can work as a team in war with such distinctions existing between officer and officer", I said little excitedly. "But continued the General, "I don't mean that they should not salute you. They must salute you as a matter of courtesy."

Before leaving, the General asked me to write an article for the Indian States Forces Journal and send it direct to him in India, which I did. This appeared in the 1942 Journal.

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His Highness with the Author

Chapter XVI

HIS HIGHNESS' VISIT

A visit from His Highness Raj Rajeshwar Maharajadhiraj Shri Maharaja Hari Singh Ji Bahadur. Inder Mohindar Sipar-i-Saltanat-Inglishia, G.C.S.I., G.C.I.E., G.C.V.O., L.L.D. to us was now overdue.

He was the Commander-in-Chief of the State Army even before he became the ruler of the State in 1925. He re-organised the State Army on modern lines and introduced the system of direct commission for the officers who were trained for about three years in the J & K Army Training School, and were then sent for attachment with different Indian Army Units and also to attend courses of instruction in British India. The Indian Military Academy (IMA) at Dehra Dun had not then come into existence. During attachments and the courses of instructions, the State Forces Officers were not very welcome as members of the Officers messes in the beginning as the British Officers were not then used to having Indians in their messes, but this reluctance on the part of the British officers gradually disappeared with time.

After the Indian Military Academy at Dehra Dun came into existence, a very limited number of vacancies were allotted there to the States, to which some officers were sent for training either before or after getting their State commission. Under the State system of selection for the commission the tests comprised of a written paper and an interview with a Selection Board presided by His Highness himself.

His Highness took great personal interest in the State Army and had done much to bring them up to a high standard of all round efficiency. At the outbreak of the second world War he placed his personal services at the disposal of His Britannic Majesty, and also placed the services of all the units earmarkad for Imperial Service at the disposal of His Excellency the Viceroy. The Mobilization of all the Infantry Battalions and the Batteries was completed in every respect and they were put in a state of readiness by 2nd September, 1939.

His Highness also offered to His Ecellency the Viceroy half a squadron of Fighter Air Craft (eight in number) at a cost of £40,000 for the defence of India, and appointed a war Aid Committee with Her Highness the Maharani as Chairman and made personal contribution towards its fund.

His Highness sanctioned a scheme of reforms for the State Army with a view to improving the status of officers and ameliorating the lot of other ranks, and met the annual extra expenditure involved from his Privy Purse. He accepted the invitation of His Excellency the Viceroy to attend the war Cabinet as a representative of India, and proceeded to London.

Such being his interest in the State Army, and his contribution towards the War effort, it was not expected of His Highness, despite his other multifarious engagements, to omit a visit to the Middle East where the First Jammu and Kashmir Mountain Battery and the bulk of the Indian Army were engaged in a fierce campaign.

In October 1941 His Highness paid a visit to the Middle East. Arrangements were made for him to stay in the Shepherds Hotel in Cairo. The exact time and place of his arrival was a secret, so I went to Cairo on the appointed date and waited at the Hotel. His Highness arrived at the Hotel accompanied by Sir K.N. Haksar and Lt. Col. Faqir Singh, his staff officers. Whether he recognised me or not I do not know, but when he passed by me without taking any notice and Captain Grice, who was on duty with His Highness, mentioned my name he turned round and shook hands with me, and said that he expected me somewhere in the battlefield.

His Highness asked Captain Grice where to go next. He ran to the Manager of the Hotel to find out. Meanwhile I led His Highness to the rooms reserved for him which I had seen beforehand. I stayed with His Highness for some time. He congratulated me on the glorious part played by the Battery under my command during the operations. He was also pleased that we were doing so well without the SSOs. I requested His Highness to pay a visit to the Battery. He said he was going to visit several units and formations in the Middle East, but the programme of his visits was to be proposed by the General Head Quarters. He added that he was sure visit to the Battery would be included in the programme.

His Highness visited several units and also paid a visit to us. He stayed with us along with his staff and an official photographer, a British Captain, detailed with him. We had hired some furniture including a sofa set, a carpet and some tables for his visit. The first thing he asked on his arrival was where did we get that furniture from. When he came to know that it was brought from Cairo on hire, he said that while on Active service he preferred to live under active service conditions and that no special arrangements should have been made for him. His Highness even took his food from the men's kitchen and asked me to remove the guard we had placed on his tent at night.

We gave a grand tea party in honour of His Highness' visit, although many invitees did not get their invitation cards in time. A variety show was arranged in the evening which His Highness very much enjoyed.

Next morning His Highness inspected us on parade and then watched us coming into action from Beach Landing Craft on the beaches of the Kabrit lake. When I explained to His Highness that we were not going very far inland in the sand on account of him, he said he was not as unfit as I thought him to be and that he could walk on that sand for miles !

After lunch, Col. Haksar took me aside and asked me to tell him briefly for His Highness' information all that we had passed through since our departure from India, I said that when His Highness was himself there I had better tell it to him myself, His Highness overheard us and told me to tell it to Col. Haksar who would pass it on to him, but I respectfully insisted that I would like to tell it to him personally. His Highness agreed, saying that he knew most of it already from my accounts, war diaries, and Intelligence summaries, which he had been always studying with interest, but I submitted that those accounts did not contain even a fraction of what had happened. His Highness commanded me to go ahead.

I submitted that relating the story verbally would amount to blowing my own trumpet, so I would like to confine myself to producing the correspondence conducted by me with the concerned authorities on different controversial matters including the SSOs and the status of the State Forces Officers. I showed him a letter received from a formation Commander asking us to let them know our rates of pay and my reply to it saying that we were getting our pay all right from the State and there was no difficulty about it. I had deliberately omitted to give our rates of pay as they did not compare well with others. At this His Highness said that if our rates of pay were not revised it was the Army Minister responsible for it. He (His Highness) had been telling him to submit a comparative statement showing the rates of pay of the State and the Indian Army Officers, which he had not yet done. His Highness then asked Col. Haksar to make a note that he would like to see the comparative statements immediately on his return. The rates of pay of the J & K State Forces officers were revised by His Highness within a few months of his return to India.

His Highness paid from his privy purse fifteen days pay to all officers, JCOs and other ranks of the unit as a gift. He asked me to let him know whether the men would like to have it in cash there or credited to their accounts in the State. One of our officers (Captain Ahsan Ali) who had stood a security for one of his relatives, who was dismissed from the Military Academy Dehradun, had to pay a sum of rupees three thousand to the State Government on that account.

After enquiring from the concerned I informed His Highness that while everybody else would like his amount to be credited to his account. Captain Ahsan Ali would like to have his amount paid to

the Accountant General against the amount of security which was being deducted from his pay. His Highness at once got the hint and said 'You want me to grant remission of that security money. I would do that only if the officer earns a Military decoration.' I submitted that earning individual distinctions in war depended among other things on chance, and the whole Battery had already earned distinctions towards which the officer had made his contributions, His Highness then said, 'All right the officer would not have to pay the security money.'

To grant a remission His Highness thought would be a very unconstitutional way of helping the officer, specially when he had once rejected the proposal submitted to him through proper channel. He therefore decided to pay the amount to the officer from his Privy Purse and issued orders to this effect on his return to the State accordingly.

I requested His Highness to pay a visit to El-lajjun in Palestine, where we had our animals and drivers. His Highness said he would not like to ask for any change in his tour programme, but when I requested again he told Col. Haksar to fix it up. Before returning to Cairo His Highness asked me if I had any difficulty in which he could help. I said I had, and then told His Highness how thankful I was to him for having given me accelerated promotion to Lieutenant-Colonel but that had created some difficulties for me, as the Battery Commanders were normally Majors and only Regimental Commanders were Lieutenant Colonels. We were about to form a part of the 26th Mountain Regiment at El-lajjun, if we were only attached to the Regiment for operational purposes, it did not matter very much as to who command the Regiment, but if we were to form a part of the Regiment I would have to hold command of the regiment if I happened to be senior to the regimental commander. In any case I was not prepared to serve under an officer junior to me.

His Highness said that this was not the time to raise such questions as he had willingly offered the services of his troops to His Majesty's Government and it was for us not to create any hitches. He said he would himself take up these matters at the proper time after the war. I submitted that I would try to create no hitches, but we would fight the enemy with redoubled effort if we were given parity of status with other officers, and begged of His Highness to leave me to fight the issue.

His Highness offered three solutions to the problem (a) call me back to the State on some other appointment (b) revert me to Major and promote to Lieutenant Colonel after the war with retrospective effect, (c) compel me not to raise the questions of status and seniority but abide by the existing rules. As regards (a) I submitted that I would not like to return to India before the end of the War. As regards (b) I did not say anything but left it to His Highness. As

regards (c) I very respectfully submitted that I would not be able to serve under any officer junior to me in rank. His Highness remarked "You would undo all what you have done so far".

In the afternoon His Highness was invited to tea by the General Officer Commanding of the area. I was invited too. His Highness introduced me to Brigadier Nash who said "Your Highness introducing him to me, he has saved the lives of my Brigade." "Don't say this on his face, he will lose his head," said His Highness. The Brigadier said "many Generals have told him so already Sir." In the evening His Highness dined with General Auchinleck C-in-C Middle East force where the question of Command must have figured in the talk.

His Highness visit to El-lajjun was fixed. I accompanied him in a two seater plane that carried him from Cairo to Haifa. We landed at, I think it was Lydda, for refuelling. It took us seven hours to reach Haifa where Colonel Allerdice received His Highness at the Aerodrome and from there we drove to El-lajjun. His Highness inspected our men and animals and also went round other Batteries of the Regt.

During lunch the Regimental Commander told us that he had told Captain Mohd. Din who was in-charge of our animals to go to the Remount Depot and select some mules in replacement of those transferred to other Batteries. But I said I would like to select the mules myself when we return from Kabrit. We flew back to Karbit the same day.

During his stay in the Middle East His Highness visited many other units, covered long journeys by air and by road, in addition to walking long distances. On the "Divali" day, which fell while His Highness was in the Middle East, he gave a message to the troops in Hindustani over the Cairo Radio, the English translation of which runs as follows :—

"Today on Devali (Festival of Lights) I am here but it is possible I may be here on the ID (Mohammadan Festival) so taking advantage of the opportunity I heartily congratulate all Indian brethren who are in the battlefield, on Divali and Id.

I have met most of you, and on seeing those whom I have met, I was pleased beyond description.

I heartily pray that all of you earn a great name and add lusture to the name of India. We are soldiers and sons of soldiers, the name of our forefathers is shining in the history and this is a great memorial they have left. Let us prove that we too have the same bravery in our blood.

I pray that you should all be happy and do your duty perfectly well.

For myself I only wish that I may be able to join you again immediately.

A few days later His Highness and party left for India by a sea plane and Captain Grice and I saw them off at the Port.

On arrival in India His Highness was gracious enough to write me the following letter :—

Srinagar—Kashmir.

My dear Bhagwan Singh,

We arrived here on the 24th after a dull and uneventful journey. At Karachi I heard that they had arranged a public reception which I did not want considering the very short time I spent in the Middle East and consequently the little I could do in that time. But I was told that things had gone too far and the disappointment by cancellation of the arrangements would be very great. So per force, I had to agree. Anyhow it was a grand affair as everything was spontaneous and done by the people on thier own. An address was presented and in reply to it I took the opportunity of making your message to the Units of our Forces (within and without the State) public.

I enclose a copy of the address and my reply; also enclose copies of :—

1) Orders directing that your message should be conveyed to all our units including detachments on outpost duty.
2) Order about depositing the amount I gave you all in lieu of amenities but you all preferred not to take there and wished to be credited to your accounts.
3) Order relieving Ahsan Ali of the burden of paying the security money due from him on his brother's account.

I assure you that I miss you all very much and I am longing to get back to you. I sincerely pray that the C-in-C Middle East will be successful in getting me back.

I hope this letter with its enclosures reaches you and that it does not suffer the fate of my congratulatory message and amenities which Her Highness' Committee sent to you months ago.

In the meanwhile the very best of luck to you all and may God be with you.

Yours sincerely,
Hari Singh

27th October 1941.

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Address presented to His Highness by his subjects at Srinagar on his return from Middle East.

We, your Highness loyal subjects, most respectfully present

to your Highness our humble duty and sincere and hearty felicitations on your Highness' safe return to your country and your people, after accomplishing an arduous journey to an important theatre of the war. In this conflict raging between sets of nations, one bent on the domination of the World and the reduction of its people to a state of servitude and the other fighting for the defence of civilization and the preservation of the rights of men, Your Highness' soldiers—our kith and kin—are playing their appointed part.

At the fall of Karen and of Damascus and in other situations of danger and difficulty, facing a highly equipped and numerically superior foe, they have already covered themselves with glory by their gallantry, their single minded devotion to duty and their unfaltering loyalty in the pursuit of their goal, victory and honour bringing in its train conditions of life which will enable men and women of every race to live without fear and to enjoy the freedom of the spirit. To these our soldiers and to the soldiers of India as a whole Your Highness carried a message of courage and hope, and our pride in them and their achievements, heartening them to greater efforts to fight without rancour but with invincible resolution a merciless foe whose creed is might without right. It will be a matter of genuine pride and pleasure to us, Your Highness' loyal subjects, to receive through Your Highness tidings of those, near and dear to us, who are participating, regardless of their lives, in their titanic struggle.

We are happy to see Your Highness back amongst your own people, and once again accord Your Highness a loyal and affectionate welcome home.

— — —

His Highness' reply to the address presented on his return from the Middle East.

I thank you for your hearty welcome, and for your allusion to my safe return to my country and my people.

I am conscious of very mixed feelings at this moment. While I am glad to see you all and to be amongst you, I am not free from regret that I could not stay longer where I have come from nor do more than I was able to do.

You will not expect me to speak at length at this moment about the impressions I gathered and the conditions I found during the time I spent in the Middle East. These were twice referred to by me, once in a broadcast which I was invited to give and again and more fully in a statement which I issued and which you will probably read in the papers in a day or two.

Most of my time was given to visiting the fighting men who have gone to this theatre of war from our country. I found them

well and extremely cheerful, bent on their business and full of confidence as to their future.

You have alluded to the part played in the War, so far, by our 1st Mountain Battery under the command of that efficient and capable officer Lt. Col Bhagwan Singh. You will be glad to know that wherever I went, and whichever Officers of high Military rank I met, no one of them could say enough about the gallantry and professional skill of this Unit, so much so that even in the Sea Plane yesterday there were congratulations offered on the splendid service which our Battery has done.

My general impression, however, is that India may look forward with calm assurance to a bright future of security and prosperity.

I cannot forgo this public opportunity of reading out the message which the officers and men of our Mountain Battery asked me to carry to their brothers-in Arms.

(*Minister-in-Waiting 'Military Dept'*)

The following is the message which the Officers of our 1st Mountain Battery asked me to carry to their brother-in Arms: —

"Brothers. You have no doubt heard of the service which we, on behalf of our Ruler and our State, were privileged to render to the Empire in more than one theatre of War. Proud as we are of this stroke of good fortune we are convinced that given a similar opportunity all of you who have received the same training under the watchful eye of our master will distinguish yourselves even more and thus add lustre and renown to his name and that of our State.

You will be glad to hear that we are all well and happy and praying that some of you at least may be able to come and fight shoulder to shoulder with us. Till then—our heartiest greetings."

Will you kindly see that this message is conveyed to every unit of our Army including such detachments who are doing duty at different points of the State.

Sd/- Hari Singh
Maharaja.

26th October 1941.

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Order No.1

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Minister-in-wating Private Deptt.

As I was unable to take any amenities for the officers and men of our 1st Mountain Battery, having travelled by air, I gave each one of them 15 days' pay with the idea that they should purchase any comforts they need. They requested that each one's share in-

His Highness Broadcasting the Message

stead of being given to him that may be credited in his account which is kept at HQ's here.

Please see that the total amount of Rs. 4,924/9/9 is so credited. This is to be paid from my privy purse.

You will notice that out of this total amount the sum of Rs. 80/- is payable to two men of the Indian Army Personnel— Veterinary Assistant 45/-and Syce Rs. 35/-. This amount has been paid by Lt. Col. Bhagwan Singh to the two men concerned. Therefore, when crediting the amount of Rs. 305/- to Lt. Col Bhagwan Singh's account please add this sum of Rs. 80/- to the amount so credited to his account. This distribution list is attached to this order. A copy of this list should be sent with the amount to Minister-in-Waiting (Army Dept.). This list includes the people additional to the authorised War Establishment and details of these extramen are appended to the distribution list for purpose of check.

Sd/-Harisingh.
Maharaja.

27th October 1941.

Order No. 2.

Minister-in-Waiting (Private Dept.)

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In continuation of my Order No.1 of date, will you please credit the account of Captain Ahsan Ali Khan Ist Mountain Battery, with the sum of Rs., 3000/-from my privy purse, in addition to the amount due to him under Order No : 1.

Harisingh.
Maharaja.

2t6h October 1941.

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AS PART OF MOUNTAIN REGIMENT

The Battery was now to move back to Palestine to join the 26th Mountain Regiment, a thing we wanted the least for various reasons.

The Regiment Commander paid us a surprise visit. He asked me what efforts he had to make in order to get us back to the Regiment. I told him that our joining the Regiment would create a lot of difficulties, the chief of which was the question of our powers of command. He said he would solve all difficulties amicably as and when they arose.

But a difficulty had already arisen. The Regimental Commander was to stay at Cairo for about ten days before going back to the Regiment, while we were returning to join the Regiment next morning. I being senior to the other Battery Commanders was naturally to get Officiating Command of the Regiment, but since the Batteries were the Indian Army Batteries and their Commanders were British, the rules did not permit my taking command over them.

I asked the Regimental Commander whether I would get Officiating command in his absence. He expressed his regret and told me that when he was in India one Gwalior State Battery was attached to his Regiment and a similar situation arose. He referred the matter to higher authorities, who gave a ruling that the Indian States Forces officers had no powers of command over the Indian Army. I told him I would rather quit. than serve under these, conditions. Discussion went on for some time and finally he said he would refer the matter to General Head Quarters during his stay in Cairo.

But that did not solve the problem. I therefore pressed my point and the Regimental Commander gave me a letter addressed to his adjutant telling him that I would hold the Officiating command in his absence. When we arrived at El-lajjun I held the Officiating command. None of the British Officers raised the slightest objection or showed any signs of discontent. A just and reasonable thing is not objected to by anybody, even if it goes against the existing rules. I asked the authorities concerned in one of my letters on the subject to decide if it would not be better to change the

rules according to the needs of the time and follow them, than to leave them as they were and violate them.

The part II order published at the Second Echelon in respect of my officiating command of the Regiment was as follows :—

"Regt. Orders by Lt. Col. Bhagwan Singh, Officiating Commanding 26Mtn. Regt., I.A. in the field.

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No. 277 Command.

Lieut-Colonel Bhagwan Singh K.A. assumed Officiating Command of the 26th Mtn Regt., w.e.f. 9 11.41 vice Major F.W. Houghton-Beckford R.A., proceeded on duty."

When the Regimental Commander returned from Cairo, he sent for me and handing over a letter to me said 'This is the ruling on the subject.'

This was a copy of a letter which I had already received and had strongly protested against it. It clearly said that the State Forces Officers had no powers of command over the Indian Army. Again a discussion followed but nothing come out of it. He said that he did not himself favour these disparities but he was helpless in the face of the ruling.

With operations almost over in Syria the troops had nothing very much to do except to keep in readiness. Short local courses were run by units and formations for officers Junior Commissioned Officers and Non Commissoined Officers and small parties were sent out for reconnaissance and sightseeing.

The Turkish attitude towards the war was very uncertain. She had not alligned herself to the Western or the Fascist block, but was accepting arms aid from both and was building a very strong army. It was natural for us to guard against the possibility of Turkey advancing through Syria into Palestine and on to the Western desert in case she decided to side with the enemy.

Two reconniassance parties were sent from the Regt. in two different directions towards the Turkish border with the dual purpose of sightseeing as well as reporting whether there was any possibility of the Turkish Army advancing that way and if so what were the chances of its success. A party from our Battery consisting of myself, two other officers and two Non Commissioned Officers, was detailed to go along the Mediterranean coast towards Tripoli. The other consisting of a British Major, two other British officers and a couple of Indian Non Commissioned Officers, went further East. We were given one three tonner, but that I thought was very unsuitable for cross country reconnaissance. I asked for two 15 cwt trucks instead, but these were not available.

We went through Haifa, Damascus, Beirut to Tripoli and on towards the Turkish Border. Damascus is an ancient city larger than Haifa with old and modern buildings and Bazars. It is the place where according to legend 'Yusaf,' a handsome slave lad, was purchased by a young and beautiful girl 'Zulekha' who loved him.

The inhabitants of this town, although well educated, quite well to do and modernised, bore signs of their ancient civilisation. Their women folk, young and old, still wore their Naqabs (veils) although these were fine enough to give the onlooker a good glimpse of their concealed pretty faces, always as willing to look at and talk to you as any other modern women in other countries. Beirut is a modern town similar to Haifa in many respects. There were many recreational institutions on the coast. Facilities for bathing in the Sea were provided by certain hotels on the sea, and many people availed of them. I tried to bathe in sea water once in the ship but I found the saltish sea water very unpleasant and I had to give it up.

We passed through Tripoli, a Syrian town on the Mediterraneon coast, and found some Australian troops in its vicinity. I went to their Headquarters for a liason visit where a sentry allowed me to enter after checking my identity card. I met many officers there. They were all extremely nice and helpful, I told them about my mission and also mentioned how inconvenient it was for us to travel in a three tonner truck and carry out our cross country reconnaissance. They at once gave me two 15 cwt trucks with two Austratralian drivers in exchange for my 3 tonner. These drivers were very obedient and respectful, and performed their duties very well indeed.

As was my habit I did not talk to them much, except on business or to find out whether they were comfortable and well looked after by our party. When they had been with us for a couple of days, my driver initiated a talk with me one day during our drive. He asked me how I succeeded in removing the British Officers from my unit. When I asked him how he came to know about it, he said the Non Commissioned Officers in our party had told him all about it. He said he was very proud of me and then hurled a couple of abuses at the British and added that those people thought too much of themselves.

We then undertook our reconnaissance of the border area, and drew necessary sketches. I wrote my rough report and returned to El-lajjun (thankfully returning the 15 cwt trucks to the Australians) where I finalised my report and forwarded it to the Regimental Headquarters. A couple of days later the Regimental Commander called me and Major Hougton Beckford, Officer Incharge of the other Reconnaissance party who too had submitted his report. The Regimental Commander took the other report in his hand first and

started pointing out its faults. He expressed his surprise at the inability of a Major Commanding a Battery to write a reconnaissance report properly. He also said that the report was not submitted in the required number of copies.

When he took up my report, I thought he would say much more than that, but to my surprise he said 'Here is a model report complete in all respects, surported by necessary sketches and written in two parts, Part I dealing with usefull general information and part II with information under particular heads, including opinion of the writer and time of the day and the year of report. He threw my report in front of the Major and asked him to go through it and resubmit his report accordingly. The opinion I had expressed in that report was that if the Turkish Army ever committed the folly of advancing over that area half the battle would already have been won by us.

I was now required to go to a near-by Remount Depot and get some Mules for the Battery. The Regimental Commander had already fixed up with the Commanding Officer of the Depot, a British Major. The Regimental Commander sent a veterinary officer (a British Captain) to assist me. We were met by the Officer Commanding at the Depot who took us around. He showed me some mules running about inside a fenced enclosure and said "Here are the mules, a very fine lot indeed. Many units have asked me to reserve these for them but how can I overlook your demand." The veterinary captain supported him and said the mules were really good. But I did not like any of them and told the Officer Commanding Depot accordingly. He said he was sorry, he had no better mules. He however said he had one more lot equally good and asked me to have a look if I liked. I looked at this lot, which looked slightly better, but not up to my standard. The veterinary officer asked him if we could choose from amongst the lot and he said he had never permitted anybody to make a selection but he was prepared to allow us to do that. But I told him there was none among the lot which I would like to select. "I have another lot" the Officer Commanding Depot said "but they are in no way better than these. I don't think you will like any but you can have a look if you like." I found this lot better than both the previous ones.

The Officer Commanding Depot said it depended on personal liking, otherwise the previous lots were equally good. He asked me to make my selection, as otherwise other units would take them. The veterinary officer also advised me not to miss the chance. But I thought even these mules were not up to the standard of our Battery and did not select any. The Officer Commanding Depot then told me he had heard that I was the most difficult man to please and he actually found me so. I said I was sorry for having such a reputation but I could not neglect my duty for the sake of reputation. He said it was not a bad reputation at all and then said he would show

me the best lot he had, but would not allow me to make a selection, I would have to accept the lots as arranged by him as he did not like to form a wrong precedent.

The lot he finally showed me was really the best. I selected the required number out of it and thanked him very much. He requested me not to tell anybody else that I was allowed to make a selection. The Officer Commanding Depot then told me that he had spent a number of years at Sialkot and had also been to Jammu and Kashmir.

The 26th Mountain Regiment had now more or less completely formed, and Colonel Alerdice the Regimental Commander was now going to have a proper hold on it. There were no difficulties as far as the other Batteries were concerned, but the case of our Battery was different. I was opposed from the very beginning to being a part of this Regiment as this could not work until the existing disparities between us and the British Officer, particularly with regard to the powers of command, were removed.

Supposing the Regiment was in action in war and unfortunately the Regimental Commander became a casualty, the next senior was automatically to take command. But if I happened to be the next senior I had no powers of command over the Batteries. Would not such a state of affairs result in chaos? Even under peacetime conditions an officer of this battery detailed on Regimental duty had no powers of command or punishment over persons he was supposed to control. The Regimental Commander, although had the powers of command over us, had practically no powers of punishment and of promotion as I myself had special powers of a Regimental commander given to me by the State over my Battery prior to our departure from India.

So the position was very anamolous and was likely to create muddles. I had therefore suggested in the beginning that the Regiment should be formed with only three Indian Army Batteries and the 1st J & K Mountain Battery should only be attached to it for operational purposes. The local commanders concerned agreed to this proposal in principle, but expressed their inability to alter the arrangements on account of higher policy. The difficulties and discontentment therefore remained. General Heath's courage and unbiased sense of justice was needed to deal with the situation.

The Regimental commander like others had heard quite a lot about us. We had made a name in the Force. He was, however, not sure whether the official appreciation of our achievements, and all that was being said about us, was not a part of the line always adopted in war in respect of all the units, that take part in it, or that it was not because having no British Officers with us we needed a greater share of patting on our backs. He therefore wanted to see a little of us. The whole Regiment was one day taken out for

shooting which continued for a couple of days. All types of shooting on different types of targets was carried. Details for predicted shooting were only worked out on paper from a given data. Ours were the only all correct calculations. Commenting on the work of the Batteries, the Regimental Commander was all praise for this Battery and said that he was convinced that the Battery was really an outstanding unit.

During this short practice camp my second-in-command Captain Amar Nath had noticed that our men were getting very much addicted to smoking. In addition to the cigarettes they received free with rations, each man spent about Rs. 15/- per month on the average on cigarettes. He started a campaign against smoking and succeeded in persuading about eighty percent smokers to give up smoking, but he was bent upon having a cent per cent result. So he appealed to me for help. I addressed the men explaining to them the evils of smoking. The remaining twenty per cent gave it up, more out of regard for me than for the evils I explained.

On our return from the camp the Regimental Commander one day called me in his office and said that he was going out of station for a week or so, but he would not be able to hand over the command of the Regiment to me for known reasons. I told him that I was not as keen to get command as I was to avoid being put under the command of a junior officer. I offered various suggestions which did not involve handing over of the command to me, but which at the same time did not require me to serve under junior officers. The soundest of them was to keep the Battery attached to the Regiment instead of making it a part thereof. The Regimental Commander agreed fully with my point of view, but said that to give a decision on this issue was beyond his competence. He could only refer the matter to the higher authorities again, but a decision would naturally take time. For the time being he said he had no alternative but to abide by the existing rules. I applied for leave for the period of his absence from the Regiment, which saved my prestige as well as gave him time to have the matter decided. The Regimental Commander was very pleased with this way out evolved by me. He sanctioned my leave and handed over command to a Major.

On his return he told me that he referred the matter again to the General Head Quarters but they were not in favour of making any change in the policy laid down. After a few days the Regimental Commander left again for a short period handing over to a Major without even talking to me. I only came to know this when it was published in the Regimental orders.

This was a far greater blow than I could bear. I had previously told and even written to the Regimental Commander that if any such thing happened I would not be prepared to accept it. The letter

which I had written already is reproduced below :—

No. Conf/K/18
1st J & K Mtn. Bty. K.A.,
Dated 2nd December, 1941.

To
The H.Q., 26 Mtn. Regt. I.A.
Subject :—POWERS OF COMMAND.
Reference our verbal talk.

———

It appears that in spite of being as good a part of the 26th Mountain Regiment, as other Batteries of the Indian Army, our officers as well as Non Commissioned officers have no power of command over any personnel of the Regiment. We have simply to fulfil the same responsibilities as the other equivalent ranks of the Indian Army do and are to be prepared to lose our lives, like the Indian Army, of course in the common cause, but inspite of our loyalty, sincerity, keenness and fitness we are not likely to enjoy the same position in the Indian Army, not even the Regt. we form part of as other officers do.

According to the decision of the G.H.Q. India, not only the Officers of this Bty. cannot have powers of command over the personnel of the Regt., but also the senior most officer of this Bty. (in the present case a Lieut. Col) can be put under the command of a Second Lieutenant. In other words, inspite of my uptodate training and experience and inspite of the excellent services the Battery has rendered under my command, I may find myself under the command of a Regimental commander of a very junior rank with limited experience, and the same applies to other officers of the Bty. who are equally well trained and experienced.

Fairness demands that there should be no distinction of any sort, between the officers, Non Commissioned Officers and men of units forming equal parts of a formation or Army, but if this distinction must continue, then at least putting senior officers of this Battery under junior officers should be avoided, even if it necessitates some extra arrangements.

A thorough comparison between the G.H.Q. India letters Nos. B/62518/1 (A.G.8) dated 16 Oct 40 and B/62518 (A.G.8) dated 10 May 1941 will show that these letters are absolutely identical except that the words "irrespective of his rank" have been omitted from the latter, where it is said that a King's Commissioned Officer will take the command. Although the ommission of these words does not change the position, yet it does indicate that the General Headquarters India did not favour the policy of putting Indian States Forces Officers under the command of King's commissioned officers, irrespective of their ranks.

It is not out of place to mention that in spite of the decision of the G.H.Q. India that the State Forces Officers will have no power of command over the personnel of the Indian Army, I often had under my command not only Indian Viceroy's Commissioned Officers and other ranks but also British, Australian and South African other ranks upto about fifteen in number attached to the Bty. for duty, for long periods and in addition on one or two occasions had command over mixed troops. For instance when we sailed from India, I was appointed the O.C. troops on board the ship when there were five Kings' commissioned Officers on board, in addition to a detachment from the Indian Army. I had not only the power of command over them, but also had the powers given, of convening a District Court Martial.

This means that the decision of the higher authorities are applied by the concerned authorities consistent with practicability.

I hope efforts will be made by all concerned to let the officers of this Bty. enjoy the same position as others and to avoid situations which will tend to destroy their prestige, and disgrace them.

If however it is desired to take the Army Head Quarters letter strictly literally and apply it as such, as has actually been done, I very much regret to have to state that I am finding it difficult to pursuade my conscience to agree to serve under an officer junior to me and inspite of my willingness to do my utmost in the War for the common and just cause, I do not find myself in a position to put my heart into work.

Could steps therefore be taken to replace me.

Sd/— Bhagwan Singh.
Lieut. Col. K.A.,
Commanding, Ist J&K Mtn. Bty., K.A.

Copy to the Chief of the Military Staff, H.H. Govt. Forces, J&K, Jammu.

———

In one of my private letters to Sir K.N. Haksar, to whom I occasionally wrote since his visit to us on His Highness staff, I made a mention of this new development and also sent a copy of the above letter. He must have shown it to His Highness who was gracious enough to write me the following letter :—

JAMMU TAVI

My dear Bhagwan Singh,

I have seen your letter of 4th Dec. to Sir Kailas as well as the copy of your representation enclosed therein.

It is a great satisfaction to me, as it should be too you, that the concerned authorities there maintain a fair and reasonable

attitude and that when you wrote there was hope of matter being settled according to the principle to which you have, throughout, courageously stuck.

You have pointed out the difficulty of the importation of political considerations into matters referring to the Army at a time when the Army is doing its duty by fighting the enemy with zeal and without counting the cost. That difficulty is a legacy from an old tradition. At the same time, it would interest you, and, indeed, reconcile you to the position of embarrassment in which you have been placed once already and may possibly be again placed, to know that the point you raised interested me so much and so deepened my own keenness for a satisfactory solution of the problem, that I immediately started investigation of facts.

The result of my enquiries, relating specially to the war of 1914-18, is that the situation you are called upon to face was faced by British (i.e. King's Commissioned European) officers themselves.

In this letter I would confine myself to the case of Brigadier Scott himself. In 1914-18, he served with a new Army Division. Most of the time he, as regular Major of 16 to 17 years of service, served under *War Commission* officers of from to two three years of service and on two occasions under *acting Lt. Colonels who had been serving under himself a couple or so months earlier.*

In laying stress upon a point of principle you have done what every officer wearing the badges of my Army should do. You have shown self respect and you have proved youreself worthy of being an officer of my Army. But in having talked as you appear to have done and written as frankly and pointedly as I see from the copy of your representation, you have already done your part. Having acquitted yourself so nobly you must not take the extreme step. The threat towards the end of your representation is of a piece with the line you have consistently maintained ever since you went to Secundrabad. You know that your efforts have brought substantial gain to the Officers and units of other States also and your manly conduct will not in the end prove unavailing but you must not overlook the exigencies of war.

Yours sincerely,
Hari Singh.
20 Dec. 1941.

Now that what I had refused to accept had actually happened, I thought the time had come for me to act without caring for the result. I at once wrote to the Regimental HQ the following letter :—

No. Conf./K/2 dated 25 Dec. 41 from the O.C., 1st J & K Mtn. Bty. K.A. to the HQ Mtn. Regt. I.A.

* * * *

Reference :—Your Regt. Order No. 324 of 24 Dec. 41.

Considering that the 1st J & K Mtn. Bty. K.A. forms a part of the 26 Mt Regt. I.A., I think the Regiment cannot function properly if officers and Non-Commissioned Officers of this Battery do not have powers of command over officers, Non-Commissioned Officers and other ranks of the rest of the Regiment and vice versa.

I have already made my position clear in this respect, in my letter No. Conf./K/18 dated 2nd Dec. '41, and I consider that the assumption of officiating command of the Regiment by an Officer holding the rank of Major, is a great blow to my prestige as a commanding officer of one of the Batteries of the Regt. holding the rank of a Lieutenant Colonel.

This has happened now for the second time in spite of difficulties having been realised and assuarances having been given that such things will not happen in this Regiment.

The General Headquarters India letter No.B/62518 (2) (A.G.8) dated 20th May 41 cannot be rigidly applied in this case as it does not deal with the units of the Indian States Forces forming part of the units of the I.A., it only deals with units stationed at the same place.

It appears that the intention is to follow this policy of putting the officers of the Indian States Forces under command of the Kings' Commissioned Officers irrespective of their ranks in spite of omission of these words from the Official letters which contained them.

Under the circumstances when an officer holding a rank lower than that of mine, assumes the command of the Regiment I would consider myself justified in not considering myself under his command.

Sd/- Bhagwan Singh.
Lt Col K.A.
O.C. Ist J&K Mtn Bty.

Copies to :—

Chief of the Military Staff, H.H. Govt. Forces, J&K alongwith a copy of an extract from the Regt. Order. Military Adviser-in-Chief, I.S.F. along with a copy of this office No. Conf./K/18 dated 2nd Dec. 41 and No.Conf./K/19 dated 11 Dec. 41 to HQ 26th Mtn. Regt. and Chief of the Milty. Staff, J&K respectively.

This letter created a stir in the higher circles. I was visited by high ranking officers, who while expressing their full sympathy with my point of view, talked of constitutional difficulties involved in the matter but promised to try their level best to have the policy modified. The Regimental Commander returued but he had no solution to offer to end the crisis.

Christmas was fast approaching and the Officers of the Regiment were preparing to celebrate it, but we were not in a festive mood. Colonel Alerdice and British Officers of the Regiment invited me and other Officers of the Battery individually to dinner. Although this was a private function and should have nothing to do with our differences in respect of powers of command, yet being very much discontented over the question of our status I looked at everything from that angle. I did not like to miss the slightest opportunity of giving vent to my injured feelings. I refused to accept the invitation on the grounds that since under the existing rules I could be put under the command of a King's commissioned Second Lieutenant, my position was something inferior to him which meant that I was not an officer at all.

Knowing that I had not accepted the invitation other officer of the Battery also did not accept them.

The Regimental Commander was very much annoyed on our having mixed up our official grouses with a private social function. He called me in the evening and tried to persuade me to accept the invitation but I refused. All officers had to see the Regimental Commander in his office next morning one by one, of course in my presence, but that made no difference. He who objected to our mixing up private things with official matters, could not help doing so himself.

———

The reply I received from Sir K.N. Haksar to one of my letters is reproduced below :—

94, Nepean Sea Road,
Bombay.
25 January. 1942.

My dear Col. Bhagwan Singh,

I have received by the same post, two covers from you, one of which contained a letter to His Highness which I duly presented to him and the other contained your acknowledgement of my last letters as well as a copy of your official representation dated December the 26th, 1941. This also I showed to His Highness.

You are aware that long before the recent occurence came to the knowledge of His Highness he had ordered your recall. So as far as you are concerned, the difficulty has been solved. Nevertheless it is great pity that inspite of the experience of the present war in general, and the capacity of individual officers in particular, Army Headquarters, India, have not yet seen the wisdom of braking from a tradition which is entirely out of date and that they continue to consider prestige more important than the efficiency of the forces which are fighting the enemy.

"Out of evil cometh good" – You may well feel sorry to leave the Battery. It is a pity that circumstances have compelled you to give up the unit which, as a result of training you gave it and of the manner in which you conducted its operations during more than one battle, acquired so much distinction.

But the courageous protest which you unflinchingly lodged, time and again, against the unfair treatment meted out to you is going to bear fruit so far as the improving the status of the officers of the Indian States Forces is concerned.

We shell soon be meeting and I look forward to having long and serious talks with you when you are detached and free from emotion.

With kind regards.

Yours sincerely,
K.N. Haksar.

One of my two letters mentioned in the above letter is produced below :—

Middle East Force
26 Dec. '41

My dear Col. Sir Kailash,

The occasion which you thought would not arise, is arising again and again. I have already written to you about the Ist occasion, that was not too bad, because I came to know of it before hand and saved my prestige by getttng some days leave. This time I could not do even that as I was not informed before hand that this was going to happen, although I had no mind to obtain any leave this time, taking leave each time this happens does not serve the required purpose.

It was published in the Regimental order that the Major had assumed the Command of the Regimant on which I wrote a letter to the Regimental Headquarters (copy attached).

This blow to my prestige as a Commanding Officer of one of the Batteries of the Regt. was stronger than I could bear, but I refrained from taking any grave step, which I don't think can be postponed for long, as I am finding it difficult to prepare myself to serve under the command of an officer holding a rank lower than that of mine. I can bear any humiliation but this.

I have tried as much as I could to avoid trouble and so I believe have the concerned Commanders here, who are trying to find out a solution, but all this will take time. I think I have to be ready to suffer, which I would gladly do if God so desires. I am quite confident that our case is just and we are suffering simply for being able to pull the same weight as others, which probably the States Forces were not expected to do.

With best wishes and kind regards,

Yours Sincerely,
Sd/- Bhagwansingh.

———

MY RETURN HOME

While our relations with the Regiment were fast deteriorating, some correspondence was going on between His Highness the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir and General Sir Claude Auchinlek the C-in-C of the Middle East Forces, probably in continuation of the talks which they must have had on the subject at that dinner in Cairo.

I received two signal messages, one from the General Headquarters Middle East Force that His Highness wanted me to return to the State to take over the command of the Jammu and Kashmir Artillery Training Centre and that I should hand over to my second-in-command and proceed to India, and the other from the 9th Army. This was the last thing I wanted, as it was my great desire to return to India only after the war and then too with my unit, but there it was :—

Both the messages are produced below :—

G.H.Q. MEF
SRME/8584/AG 6(a)
21 Dec. 41

Subject :—**Postings** : **Officers.**

Palestine Area

RA (Ref. Their RA/ME/123/25 of 8 Dec. 41)
Copies to :— 02 E

H.H. The Maharaja of Kashmir has requested that Major* Bhagwansingh Commanding 1 J & K Mtn. Bty. be returned to India to command the Artillery Training Centre in Kashmir. The present 2-in-command will take over command.

2. Please issue the necessary orders for despatch of Major Bhagwansingh to India.

Sd./- M.D. Burdon.
for Maj. Gen.
DAG.

Message No. 250 A dated 29th Dec. 1941 from Ninth Army to J & K Mtn. Bty. Rtd PAL BASE.

**Although I was a Lt. Col. then, there was a purpose in displaying ignorance about it in this message.*

"Despatch Major Bhagwansingh to report Mena camp forthwith for onward journey to India."

I was both happy and sorry ; sorry because I was leaving the unit I had begun to love, and happy because of what I had done to raise the prestige and status of the State Forces Officers and units. Although I had not yet met with complete success in the matter of removing existing disparities as I had in the matter of special Service Officers, I had prepared the ground for it and had set the ball rolling. I was sure that in due course a decision would come in our favour, and in 1943 decision did come, which did away with all the disparities. It was decided to grant superimposed short service regular commission to all the State Forces Officers when on duty outside their states, as was proposed in one of my letters in 1941 from the Middle East. I was therefore completely vindicated.

My sudden recall to India solved the problem for the time being. It also gave a chance of promotion to my second-in-command and others. I handed over to my second-in-command on the 15th January 1942 and left the Battery after a grand farewell party given by the unit, to which all officers of the Regiment were also invited. In his farewell speech my Second-in-command said much more in my praise than I actually deserved, most of it being meant for the consumption of the British Officers of the Regiment. Captain Tewson, the Adjutant of the Regiment, came to see me off at the Railway Station. He personally loaded my luagage in the train, as there were no porters available.

I arrived at Cairo the next day and went to the Meena Transit camp close to the famous Pyramids that count among the seven wonders of the world. These Pyramids are wonderful living monuments of the ancient Egypt an civilisation. People boast today of their great Engineering skill, but they have yet to learn how these pyramids were erected by the Pharoahs during their period of rule from 3400 BC to 2400 BC.

Those people believed, as many do even today, in a world after death and that it was necessary for the survival of the soul to care for the dead body. So they invented in those days a rare embalming fluid, which enabled dead bodies buried deep in pyramids to be well preserved for thousands of years if not for ever. Those bodies called mummies when revealed today are in an excellent state of preservation. Along with these mummies are preserved valuable utensils of sorts, jewellery, arms and writings. There are inscriptions on the walls which give much information on Egyptian civilisation.

The famous Sphinx, that huge and curious object made in stone with the head of an Egyptian ruler of the past and the body of a lion in a sitting position, was in full view from the Transit camp itself though at a great distance. I thought it was a wonderful object, very skilfully made, but I was not very sure whether it

justified its inclusion among the seven wonders of the world. Probably a closer view would have convinced me.

Cairo is a large cosmopolitan town which I had visited once before during our stay at Kabrit, but I did not then have time to see much of it. I just passed through one of the main Bazars. Like towns in Palestine and the west, here too selling on the shops was mostly done by sales girls.

One of our officers went to a barber's shop for a hair cut, he was received by a group of girls. One made him sit on the chair, the other put a piece of cloth round his neck, another sprayed scent and yet another massaged his face and head, before the barber appeared. After the hair cut a bill of £1 Egyptian (Rs. fourteen and annas seven in Indian money) was presented to him by the prettiest of all, which he paid but never had his hair cut in Cairo again.

I made a few purchases including a stone for a ring called 'Zercon Diamond' for rupees eighty. I had a mind to purchase a radio set. I enquired the price of a 5-valve Philips Battery operated radio set, but considering that prices in India should be about the same I dropped the idea. On my return to India I found that it was cheaper there by Rs. 150/-

While still in the transit camp waiting for shipping accommodation I received a letter informing me that His Highness had been graciously pleased to grant me a hereditory Jagir of Rs.3600/-per annum in recognition of what he was pleased to call my "meritorious and outstanding services to the Ruler of the Sate and the country worthy of emulation by others."

His Highness had received several congratulatory messages and telegrams, not only from the formation commanders concerned but also from the Commander-in-Chief Middle East Force and His Excellency the Vicerory of India on the praiseworthy part played by the Battery in war. A General Officer Commanding of a British Division had said that we had set an example to his Division (British). The All India Radio and the British Broadcasting Corporation had mentioned our achievements in their news broadcasts, a news-reel showing us in action around Cheren was shown in the Cinema halls and open air cinema shows to troops etc. and all Indian News Papers had said something or the other in our praise.

Some extracts from the "Jammu and Kashmir Information April 1944" including His Highness commands regarding grant of a Jagir to me as published in the Gazette Extraodinary in the State are reporduced below :-

"General Sir Claude Auchinleck Commander-in-Chief of the Imperial Forces in the Middle East, conveyed his personal appreciation of the Battery to His Excellency the Commander-in-Chief of India (General Sir Archibald Wavell now H.E. Lord Wavell, the

Viceroy of India) who while adding his own appreciation, conveyed it telegraphically to His Highness in the following terms :-

"I am very happy to be able to send your Highness an extract from a telegram received from General Auchinleck today. It begins : Jammu & Kashmir Mountain Battery acquitted itself with great distinction in recent Damascus fighting. Divisional Commader commends highly its steadiness under enemy artillery fire and the accuracy of its own fire supporting British Infantry Message ends. General Auchinleck adds his own personal appreciation. I wish your Highness and your State Forces every success in the future."

This telegram was given wide publicity among the Military units of the State, who were called upon by His Highness to take the conduct of the Battery as an example to imitate."

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"In recognition of the meritorious and conspicous services rendered by Lt. Col. Bhagwansingh, and as an incentive to other officers, His Highness was graciously pleased to grant an hereditary Jagir of Rs. 3,600/- per annum in his favour. In announcing the conferment of Jagir upon Lt.Col, Bhagwansingh His Highness was pleased to issue the following order on 20th December 1941 (which was published in an axtra-ordinary issue of the State Government Gazette)

"The Ist Jammu and Kashmir Battery under the command of Major (Now Lt. Col.) Bhagwansingh left India on the 25th September, 1940, for the Middle East. Since then it has participated in the campaigns in Eritrea and Syria and has taken part in a number of battles, notably those of Keren and Damascus.

"In every enagement in which it has taken part it has achieved distinction and has added lustre to the name of the STATE by its outstanding gallantry. Its devotion to duty has been testified to as utterly regardless of difficulty and danger. Thus by its conduct it has contributed a resplendent chapter to the long record of Indian heroism.

"For their valour and skill all ranks of the Battery deserve a full measure of credit. Indeed no praise can be too high for them. Most of all does the Commander of the Battery, under whose inspiring and exclusive leadership the battery has won such distinction, deserve credit and recognition for the services which have rendered the name of the Jammu and Kashmir Army famous.

"As mark of a appreciation and in recognition of the meritorious and memorable services rendered by Lt. Col. Bhagwansingh and as an incentive to other officers of my forces who may be called upon under similar difficult and dangerous circumstances to fight, if necessary upto the very last for the honour of their country and in the service of their Ruler, I sanction hereby an hereditary Jagir

of Rs. 3600/-per annum in favour of Lt. Col. Bhagwansingh to be held by him and his heirs male the direct line in the perpetuity. I trust that the name of Lt. Col. Bhagwansingh coupled with my recognition of his services will prove an inspiration to the officers and men of my Forces and that his example will find many emulators.

"The Jagir will be an assignment of the land revenue of a particular village are villages to be selected by the Revenue Minister, in consultation with the Minister-in-Waiting and Lt. Col. Bhagwnsingh's father (Th. Kashmir Singh).

"When the villages have been selected the Patta should be drawn up accordingly and handed over to Th. Kashmir Singh for safe custody against the return of Lt. Col. Bhagwansingh.

"This order will take effect from 16th Katik 1998 corresponding to 1st November 1941."

This order illustrates how great a regard His Highness had for ones services, although what I had done was nothing more than my duty. Truly speaking no recipients of gallantry awards and decorations in war have ever done anything outside their duty, but doing ones duty well, or in other words devotion to duty in the face of risks and danger, certainly does deserve encouragement, as there are very few people who choose to take risks although most of those who do, do so not for the sake of awards. There have been cases when highly deserving persons have failed to receive any encouragement in any form either because their gallant actions remained unnoticed or because a concocted story of somebody else's achievements was considered more worthy of encouragement.

In any case the system of granting awards is recognized and adopted by all Governments, and the awards are made in different forms, such as certificates, medals, cash, land or prepetual Jagirs, depending upon the degree of gallantry and merit of the act or services considered worthy of recognition by the Government of the day.

Governments may have failed to reward ones outstanding services in war for various reasons, but to the best of my knowledge no Government had ever confiscated or resumed any awards granted in recognition of one's gallant and outstanding services in the Field by any of their predecessor Governments, for reasons which have nothing to do with the recipients of the awards.

The first so called popular Government of the State headed by Sheikh Mohd. Abdullah, however, enjoined upon themselves the unique honour of resuming my "Jagir" immediately on coming into power without any compensation whatsover even for the Bunglow I constructed, the garden I planted, and other improvements I made in the "Jagir" during the short period for which I held it. If Gallantry awards granted by one Government are resumed by

another on a change of Government, than in a democratic set up, where a change of Government is a regular occurrence, the Army can hardly have any confidence in the Government of the day !

Some other commendatory letters and messages official and private are given in Appendix I.

At last I sailed for India from Port TOFIK in December 1941 on board the ship City of Paris which was bound for Trinchomalee in Ceylon carrying eighty officers. There was another Indian Second Lieutenant Parbhu Singh (later Lieutenant-Colonel) on board the ship. He shared the cabin with me.

An A/A (Anti-aircraft) Battery on board the ship gave us a demonstration of shooting by A/A guns. A large baloon was tied to an aeroplane by means of a very long string and fired at continuosly for quite a long time by more than one A/A gun, but the baloon flew unharmed.

We disembarked at Trinchomalee and proceeded to Colombo and then Madras, partly by train and partly by steamer, whence I proceeded to Jammu. The city of Paris which brought us to Trinchomalee was torpedoed on her return voyage by the enemy, and sunk.

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Chapter XIX

BACK IN INDIA

With my return to India ended what I consider to have been the most important chapter of my life. Most people judge the justification or otherwise of one's actions from their re-actions and not from the validity of the actions themselves. A great majority of people do not possess necessary sense of independent judgement; to them any action is good or bad according to what their superiors think. I was for myself very proud of having succeeded in turning out the Special Service Officers from my unit which resulted in their withdrawal from all the units of the Indian State Forces. I know I had so many achievements to my credit to be proud of including roaring success in the operations, command over the British, Indian and other allied officers, personnel and detachments and over an Indian Mountain Regiment inspite of the rules preventing it, and my firm stand with regard to our status and powers of command in the only case in which command was denied to me, which too was sure to be decided in our favour in due course of time. But I also knew that Brigadier (later Major-General) H.L. Scott Chief of the Staff Jammu and Kashmir State Forces did not very much approve of my activities except those on the operational side. He had given vent to his feelings on all these subjects in his private letters to me in the Middle East.

With the Chief of the Staff so indifferent I did not expect anything better from others. I thought I would be received in the State not as a successful war Veteran but as a condemned person and therefore wanted to enter the State quietly. I did not inform anybody about the date and time of my arrival at Jammu except my elder brother Lieutenant Colonel (Later Brigadier) Krishna Singh, who gave me a pleasant surprise by meeting me at Ranbirsinghpura, two stations short of the Jammu Cantt. Railway Station where I was to detrain.

Contrary to my expectations I found large crowd at the Railway Station waiting to receive me. All Military Officers except of course Brigadier Scott, many Junior Commissioned Officers, other ranks, some civilian friends, photographers and my relatives including my revered father, brothers, my eldest son aged twelve and others, were there.

I was so heavily garlanded by most of them that I must have removed some ten loads of garlands, each big enough to conceal

my eyes. I was taken in what amounted to a large procession to my brother's bungalow, where those who cared to stay on were entertained with tea. Very few people, if any, knew about my struggle in respect of the Special Service Officers or the Command of the Regiment. All they knew was the great achievement of the Battery in the field of Battle, which were highlighted by different sources more specially by His Highness' speech delivered on his return from the Middle East and recorded on gramophone records a couple of which were given to each unit. I met the Chief of the Staff at his residence but he had nothing to talk about except weather etc.

I had not yet met my revered mother, wife and two children who were at my village (Sochani) fourteen miles South East of Jammu. I rang up the Chief of the Military Staff next morning and asked for five days casual leave. He sanctioned the leave and said that he had sent me a letter asking me to explain why in disregard of one of his letters I had been writing objectionable letters in respect of our status and powers of command. He also told me that this was just a formality and if I simply expressed my regret over having taken that stand the matter would be dropped. I did not discuss much on telephone and told him that I would send my explanation when I receive the letter. When I returned from my village the following letter was waiting for me :—

HIS HIGHNESS' GOVERNMENT JAMMU AND KASHMIR.

From

The Chief of the Military Staff,
JAMMU.

To

Lieut—Colonel Bhagwansingh,
J & K Artillery,
C/O Lieut. Col. Krishna Singh, 9th Inf.,
Jammu Cantt.

No. 3663/m dated Jammu the 11-2-1942.

The last paragraph of your letter No. Conf./K/22 dated 25th December 1941 addressed to the Head Quarters 26 Mountain Regiment R.A., with a copy to the Chief of the Military Staff (Copy attached) appears to be subversive of discipline and moreover to have been written in disregard of the instructions contained in the Chief of the Military Staff's letter No. 1376/MW dated 16th August 1941 (copy attached).

Please submit an explanation to me direct.

Sd/-H.L. Scott,
Brigadier,
CHIEF OF THE MILITARY STAFF.

I thought that having taken such a bold stand for a cause which I was quite convinced was just, if I expressed my regret as suggested by the Chief of the Staff I would undo all that I was so proud of having done. Brigadier Ghansara Singh, General Staff Officer, and Brigadier Rajendra Singh, Commander Jammu Brigade, asked me to show them my reply to the Chief of the Staff's letter before sending it to him, but I showed it to them only after I sent it. Not only I did not express my regret as suggested by the Chief of the Staff, but I also expressed my pride over the stand taken by me proving by quoting instances the futility and impracticability of the existing policy, which was violated or followed by the local commanders according to the needs of the occasion, or their sense of judgement, all of whom however were in favour of a modification of the policy. Moreover Brigadier Scott had in one of the letters to me advised me to make verbal representations on well chosen occasions which I had made but had produced no results in the case under reference.

In the end I suggested that the State authorities should take the matter up with the British Government of India and have the policy modified. My letter of explanation is reproduced below :—

No.18/G,

Dated Jammu Cantt the 17th Feb. 42

To

The Chief of the Military Staff,

J&K State Forces, Jammu.

Reference your No. 3663/M dated 11-2-42.

My No. Conf./K/22 dated 25th Dec. 1941, was written as a protest against the appointment of a Major as Officiating Officer Commanding the 26th Mtn. Regt., I.A. when I was commanding one of the Btys. of the Regt. inspite of assurances having been given that such things would not happen in the Regiment.

Since the formation of the 26th Mtn. Regt. I.A. which consisted of three Batteries of the Indian Army and the Ist J & K Mountain Battery, different problems arose necessitating some modifications to the policy laid down by the GHQ India regarding the powers of command. The more we functioned as a Regiment, the more evident became the impracticability of the policy. Even if I had not objected to serve under officers of junior ranks, strict enforcement of the policy would have led to difficulties unprecedented in the history of the Armies Some examples of the type of the difficulties faced or likely to be faced are as follows :—

1. The position of an officer of the J & K Mountain Battery

detailed as Regt. Orderly Officer without powers of Command was simply ridiculous.

2. When mixed parties of the Regt. consisting of the men from I.A. Batteries, and NCOs and men from the J & K Mountain Battery marched or travelled together, the N.C.Os of the J & K Mountatn Battery had to march under the soldiers of the other Batteries.

3. During operations when the Regt. deploys, the Regt., Commdr., tells one of the Battery commanders, generally but not necessarily senior, to act as the Regtl. 2nd-in-command, but the J & K Mountain Battery commander could not have been told to act as such, even if he was the only one available for the purpose.

4. If during operations the J & K Mountain Battery needed an escort for its protection when in action in an isolated position and if it was given, the Battery Commander would have had no powers of command, over the escort hence the danger of losing the guns.

5. When the J & K Mountain Battery is working independently and detachments of the M.T. etc British or Indian are attached to it for duty etc. the Battery Commander has neither powers of command nor of punishment over the detachment, but he is responsible for their discipline.

It was therefore felt by all concerned that modifications according to the local conditions, of the policy laid down was necessary in any case. The GHQ INDIA letter defining the policy was disregarded in all cases before we formed a part of the Regt., and in many cases after it, suitable methods were adopted to meet the local conditions, but these methods were often based on personal considerations. If on one occasion the policy was disregarded on the grounds that it was impracticable, on the other inability to depart from it inspite of willingness and necessity for doing so was expressed because of its being the official policy. However my representations were being considered sympathetically, the correctness of my point of view fully realised, all possible ways of overcoming the legal difficulties considered and the situation was being gradually improved. It was at this stage that your letter No. 1376/MW dated 16 Aug. 1941 was received.

The policy was already changed, and not only I myself was given Command over mixed troops on many occasions, but also senior officers of other States Forces when put in charge or Prisoners of War, were always given command over escorts consisting of detachments of different units of the Indian Army, each commanded by a British Officer. It is a pity that I who was the first, if not the only Officer so far, to prove the fitness of State Forces Officers for command in War had to be the victim of the policy, and not only I was not given officiating command purely on

account of GHQ INDIA letter, but also was put under the command of an officer holding a rank lower than that of mine, belonging to the same Regt. I, as well as all officers of the Battery, were therefore losing pres ige, not only in the Battery but also in the Regt. and even in the whole force. This coupled with the resultant inferiority complex which all officers and N.C.Os of the Battery were suffering from was badly effecting the efficiency of the Battery and was detri mental to the interests of the service.

It was to avoid such a situation and not to gain any personal advantage that I found myself duty bound to make a timely representation with a view to improve the affairs with the co-operation of the concerned commanders on the spot, which was not lacking, and who were as keen to finda practicable solution to the problem as I was.

The representations were not made in disregard of your letter which contained a suggestion that representation may be made to superior officers (preferably by word of mouth). Verbal representations were made from time to time, but decisions arrived at as a result of these were sometimes found to have been misunderstood. Written representations were therefore made in perfect goodwill in the interests of the Service and to accelerate our efforts to defeat the enemy, which was the only object all of us had in view, without the least intention of disregarding the spirit of your letter.

May I suggest, not in my own interest but in the interest of service, that efforts be made to find a satisfactory solution to the problem.

Sd/- BHAGWAN SINGH
Lt. Colonel, K.A.

Needless to say that the Chief of the Staff did not like my explanation. His future attitude towards me was not difficult to understand.

His Highness was then at Bombay. He had asked the Chief of the Staff to arrange with the embarkation staff at Bombay that as soon as I disembark there, I should be sent to him, but as I did not come via Bombay that could not be done. His Highness was telegraphically informed accordingly and he summoned me to Bombay, where I stayed for about a week. [Before I left for Bombay Brigadier Ghansara Singh, Commander Jammu Brigade, held a Tea Party in my honour, in which all the Ministers, Judges of the High Court and all the civil and Military Gazetted Officers at the Station were invited. General Scott particularly came to me and shook hands saying "I must meet the guest of honour."

On my return from Bombay I proceeded on two and a half months leave, a great part of which I spent at Srinagar. I called on Sir Gopalaswami Ayyangar, the then Prime Minister of Jammu &

Kashmir at his residence. He already wanted to see me. He asked me if by refusing to serve under the officiating Regimental Commander I had not laid myself open to a charge of insubordination. I said there was no such thing as insubordination in the Manual of Indian Military law. He said disobedience of command in the army was a greater offence, but I told him that disobedience of a lawful command was an offence in the army, and not of an unlawful command. As the command which placed me under the command of a junior officer was not lawful, I had committed no offence in having disobeyed it.

I expected another question from him, and had my reply at the tip of my tongue, but he did not ask any. The question was very valid and the Chief of the Staff had indirectly laid stress on it in his letter which he said that I had contravened. It was that the policy had been accepted by His Highness and it was incumbent on all his officers to carry it out loyally and faithfully. My defence was that I, or for that matter all officers, had never been informed previously about the acceptance of the policy by His Highness nor was there any mention of it in the terms and rules of service under which the State Officers were supposed to be serving. Since it was outside all rules and regulations, officers could not be compelled to carry out the policy without their having first accepted it.

The Prime Minister discussed the matter fully with me and finally said that he knew the whole case, and agreed that the policy required a change. He then talked about the superiority complex and the inferiority complex that the British and the Indians respectively had, and then quoted one case in which an English Lady had kicked a policeman on traffic duty at Gulmarg and under pressure from the British resident in the State the concerned police authorities under instructions from the British Inspector General of Police were taking the policeman to task. He told me how he intervened, saved the policeman and made the lady apologise. He quoted the saying about Uncle Sam. 'If you lick him he will kick you, if you kick him he will lick you." In the end he congratulated me for the good name I had earned for the State and the country.

Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah the President of the National Conference (Later Prime Minister of Jammu and Kashmir) met me near the Pratap Park once in Srinagar and after warmly shaking hands with me heartily congratulated me on the excellent work I had done in war, thereby enhancing the prestige and honour of the State and the country. And so did Chowdhari Ghulam Abbas, President of the State Muslim League (Later President of the so called Azad Kashmir) when he once met me at the First Brigade Srinagar.

Once I had gone to a hotel in the Amirakadal Chowk (later

named Lal Chowk by Sheikh Abdullah and his party) a Kashmiri Pandit boy came to me and asked if I was Col. Bhagwan Singh. When I said yes, he went back running and soon returned with another Kashmiri Pandit gentleman who introduced himself to me as Pandit Jia Lal Kilam and said he was very proud of me and had a great mind to see me. He was lucky he said to have met me so easily. Pandit Jia Lal Kilam later became a Judge of the State High Court. When I returned to Jammu at the end of my leave, La'a Hans Raj Dogra, President of the Dogra Sabha, came to my residence at Jammu Cantt. and said that the Dogra Sabha wanted to take me to the town in a procession and to hold a public meeting in my honour, but I begged to be excused.

Once I was buying some fruit at a shop in Raghunath Bazar Jammu when some college students came and asked the shopkeeper rates of certain fruits. One asked the rate of one thing and the other of something else and so on. The shopkeeper got annoyed and told them not to joke him like that. One of them said that they were sorry but they had come not to buy fruit but to have a look at me. I then talked to them for a while, and they happily left.

Brigadier Scott our Chief of the Staff was not happy over my explanation. He did not like to make a fuss about it at a time when my reputation was at its climax, but at the same time did not like to overlook what to him was a grave act of indiscipline and which struck at the very roots of the British Policy in India, or in other words amounted to fighting Imperialism from within its ranks. He wanted to see me condemned for my actions committed out side his jurisdiction under different commanders, who themselves had full powers to take any disciplinary action they liked but considered no action necessary on account of the impracticability of the policy, and continued his efforts to that end.

One day I was told by Brigadier Scott that Hon'ble the Army Minister (Pandit R.C. Kak later Prime Minister of the State) wanted to see me in his office in connection with my explanation. I saw the Army Minister who, contrary to my expectations, warmly congratulated me on what I had done in war and said he was very proud of me. He, however, mentioned that the Chief of the Staff was not pleased with my attitude in the matter of powers of command, and also with my explanations. With His Highness, the Prime Minister and the Army Minister not so much in favour of censuring me, the Chief of the Staff felt compelled to do something about it himself. He did not miss any opportunity of running me down, even if it amounted to stooping low, judging by his own standards.

I had and still have a very high opinion of General Scott who was the first British Chief of the Staff to be promoted to the rank of a Major General by His Highness. He was a very experienced

officer, recipient of the Distinguished Service Order (DSO) and the Military Cross (M.C.) and was a Staff College graduate (PSC). He had done much to improve the standard of efficiency of the State Forces Officers and units, and his behaviour with the officers was praiseworthy. He was extremely reasonable and quite popular among the State Forces. He had helped me in almost all the cases I referred to him from the Middle East. Even in the matter of the powers of command his letter to me, official as well as private, were as soothing as they could possibly be. When we left India for the Middle East the Detention allowance of Rs. 7/-daily which the Officers were getting for being on duty outside the State was stopped as the rules did not permit the continuance of this allowances outside India.

As our rates of pay were low, and I did not see any sense in paying this allowance when serving under peace conditions in India, but stopping it in war, which required encouragement and not discouragement, I wrote to General Scott about it. In his letter on the subject he agreed to try and have the continuance of the allowance sanctioned but to get added strength to the case he wanted me to have a line writtten by the Senior Special Service Officer. We had got rid of the Special Service Officers then, and I informed him in reply to his letters, for the first time, that unfortunately we had no SSO. Even if we had one, I would have preferred to forgo the allowance than to obtain a recommendation from the SSO when I had always tried to keep them completely out of the show. Due to General Scott's efforts and H.H's ever readiness to do all what he could for the army, we continued to receive our Detention allowance.

I always had and still have a great respect for him and have no doubt that he was one of the best, if not the best, Chief of the staff we ever had. Unfortunately however, he was prejudiced against me after I took my stand in the matter of powers of command and more particulary after my explanation of it, as the following incidents will show. I was attached to the Jammu and Kashmir Artillery Training Centre when the Military Adviser-in Chief Indian States Forces General Mills inspected us on parade. While watching a squad of recruits at foot drill he noticed that they sprang up unnecessarily at a right or left turn. "Who has taught them this" The General asked. "The person who has won the battle of Cheren" replied General Scott, although I was attached to the Artillery Training Centre only about a week before and had little to do with its training.

Mr. H.L. Gupta, Principal of the Model Academy, Jammu, expressed his desire to have me on the School Board. It was a Government aided Educational Institution and there was nothing in the Government servants conduct Rules to prevent me from accepting membership of the Board, but as I was not keen I told him

that it would require Government sanction and I would not like to apply for it. He said he would himself apply. Whether it was right for him to apply and whether he applied for it or not I do not know, but it appears he published my name in the prospectus of the academy as a member of the Board. General Scott at once wrote to me calling for an explanation.

The war having ended in the Middle East, the Ist J&K Mountain Battery returned to India almost on my heels and the 2nd Mountain Battery was on duty on the North West Frontier of India. Whether inspired by the excellent work done by the Ist J&K Mountain Battery, or due to political considerations, His Majesty's Government of India asked His Highness's Government for the complete transfer of both the Batteries and the Artillery Training Centre to the Indian Army which was agreed to. The Officers were offered permanent Regular Commissions as Second Lieutenants and were given the option to stay or to opt out for the State. They all opted out.

The 3rd J&K Battery had already been disbanded on the transfer of the remaining Artillery units to the Indian Army caused a good deal of resentment among the public in the State as they sensed some political motive in this attempt on the part of His Majesty's Government to weaken the J& K State Forces. Though the public could not then foresee the partition of India and the consequent invasion of the State of Jammu and Kashmir by Pakistan tribesmen and others which took place within about three years of this transfer it is just possible that the British Government had foreseen this and had hence pressed for control of the batteries. The 7th J&K Infantry was also disbanded in about the same period following a case of indiscipline in the unit.

I was posted to the Jammu and Kashmir Infantry Training Battalion as Commandant, but was soon put in command of the Ist Jammu and Kashmir Infantry at Srinagar. Brigadier Udey Chand Bakshi, Commanding Kashmir Brigade, proceeeded on two months leave and I held officiating command of the Brigade in his absence. The Brigade commander was also the Cantonment Authority and exercised the powers of the Cantonment Boards in other cantonments under the cantonment Rules and also had the Judicial powers of Ist Class Magistrate. I received a number of representations from different civilians of respectable status, stating that they had submitted their plans for construction of houses etc. over their lands within the cantonment area months back but they had heard nothing about them.

I looked into their cases, all the necessary formalities such as the Health Officers reports, the Executive Officers and the Sub Overseers reports had been favourably made, but no orders had been passed. I was told by the Brigade Major (Major Abdul Hamid

later Lieut. Col.) that Brigade commanders obtained the Chief of the Staff's verbal approval before they sanctioned the plans. As the Chief of the Staff was in Jammu for the winter, they had to wait until the offices moved to Srinagar next summer. The cantonment rules clearly laid down that the final authority for sanctioning such plans was the cantonment Authority, so I visited the sites myself and after checking that they were according to the cantonment rules, sanctioned all of them. When the offices moved to Srinagar next summer, the Chief of the Staff found so many buildings coming up in the cantonment area. He enquired from the Brigade Commander who had since rejoined from leave and found that I had sanctioned the plans. Without asking me to explain he submitted a Memo to His Highness, saying that I had committed a grave irregularity in having permitted the construction of those buildings but as the sanction had been given the irregularity committed by me may be condoned. I came to know about it long after the so called irregularity was condoned by His Highness.

In the meantime I had also purchased some land in the cantonment area for building a house. I submitted the plans to the Cantonment Authority but I did not receive the sanction for a long time. I met the Cantonment Authority personally and requested him to expedite the sanction. He visited my land and checked the plan after it had been favourably reported upon by concerned staff. The Cantonment Authority permitted me verbally on spot to start constructions next morning, and promised to convey me the sanctioned plans during office hours next day. I started the construction, but the sanctioned plans never arrived. I reminded the Cantonment Authority and he said his Executive Officer was out so he could not convey the sanction, but he told me to go ahead. A few days passed and the offices moved from Jammu to Srinagar. The Chief of the Staff came that side for an evening ride and saw the construction in progress.

He asked the Cantonment Authority about it. Whether the Cantonment Authority told him or not that verbal sanction had been given and a written sanction promised, I do not know, but what I received next day was not the sanctioned plans but a letter asking me to stop construction. I, however, did not stop it. The Chief of the Staff passed that way again and saw the construction in progress. He told the Brigade Commander to send a working party from the Battalion I commanded and have the construction razed to the ground. The Cantonment Authority, however, realised his duty in the end and wrote to the Chief of the Staff recommending sanction. The latter once again submitted a memo to His Highness depicting me to have committed a great irregularity and again recommending the irregularity to be condoned.

Once the Chief of the Staff was directing a Tactical Exercise without troops. A problem was being discussed and different

officers gave their solutions, when I offered a solution, General Scott said "Let us hear the war veteran now. I had forgotten him altogether, without him we were all groping in the dark". He rediculed me like this on many occasions and showed open difference towards me. I was so fed up with all this that J started thinking of applying for retirement although I still had about ten years or more to serve to entitle myself to full pension.

The rates of pay of officers and all others had only sometime back been increased by His Highness. One had to complete at least three years on new pay to entitle himself to its benefit in pension. So I decided to wait and see. As after all I was under no compulsion to apply for retirement.

Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru visited Jammu in the days when rates of pay were revised and was staying at the palace. Units marched past His Highness, who took the salute at the palace entrance. I was commanded to stay on after the March Past, and was introduced to Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru by His Highness as "the fellow who enhanced the prestige of the State." His Highness also commanded me to show him my papers as I showed His Highness in the Middle East. I did not have all of them with me, but had obtained copies of some of them after my arrival in India, which I later showed to him, and he was very much impressed. He asked me which University I was a graduate of and I told him, I was not a graduate at all.

When Dr. Jayakar once visited Srinagar and stayed as His Highness' guest at one of the guest houses, I received the following letter from Sir K. N. Haksar who was still on His Highness' staff :—

Chashmashahi House,
Srinagar Kashmir,
2nd June, 1942.

Dear Col. Bhagwan Singh,

His Highness has commanded that you should see the right Hon'ble Dr Jayakar who is staying at Iqbal Manzil (Guest House No. 4) and show him the papers about the fight you fought in the Middle East, as you did to the Rt. Hon'ble Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru year before last. Dr. Jayakar has been told that you will see him, but you will have to ring up and fix the day and hour.

Yours sincerely,
K.N. Haksar.

I met Dr. Jayakar at the Guest House and showed him the papers.

My name appeared in the newspapers as having been mentioned in Despatches and later I received an official intimation from the Secretary of State for War, as follows :—

"By the Kings order the name of Lieut. Colonel Bhagwan Singh Royal Artillery Indian Army was published in the London Gazette on the 30th December 1941 as mentioned in a Despatch for distinguished service. I am charged to record His Majesty's appreciation.

Signed Secretary of State
for War.

I did not expect even this. Later I came to know from my colleagues that knowledgeable friends had told them that I was recommended for the award of a D.S.O. (Distinguished Service Order) but it was turned down on account of what they called my Anti-British activities.

Days passed, but General Scott's attitude towards me did not improve. I applied for retirement in a very brief letter in the following words in spite of an order that no retirement would be permitted during the war.

"Retirements during the war are not permitted, but to make room for a better person is to help the war effort. With this end in view I hereby apply for retirement."

The application was sent from Naushera about eighty miles North West of Jammu to the Jammu Brigade then commanded by Brigadier Udey Chand, who I was told took it to the Chief of the Staff the same day, who in turn submitted it to His Highness through the Army Minister with unusual speed. To his great disappointment however, His Highness refused to consider my retirement. General Scott's attitude towards me stiffened further.

Another Officer. Captain Hanwant Singh, became a victim of British Policy. He was on duty with one of our units outside the State, under overall command of a British Lieut. Colonel, when he took exception to his British Commanding Officers remarks made on the mess table regarding His Highness' Private life. He was put under special report for being late on parade or some such thing and returned to the State. He was posted to my unit and I was asked to report on him after six months. I did not find anything wrong with the Officer and reported favourably on him, but the Chief of the Staff recommended his dismissal and he was dismissed from service.

On the completion of our tenure of duty at Naushera we moved to Jammu and had gone to Nagrota about 9 miles North of Jammu for Mountain Warfare Training. A short time before a letter had been received from the Chief of the Staff that whenever any units go to camp for training they must invite His Highness to their camp as he takes great pleasure in seeing the troops on training in camps.

General Scott saw us on an exercise at this camp. At the end of the exercise I asked him to convey our invitation to His Highness,

as was desired in one of his letters. General Scott jumped as if bitten by something and shouted "what have you to show to His Highness. Do you think he is going to pat you at the back. He will pull you to pieces if he comes."

We moved back to our mess where in the presence of the Brigade Commander (Brigadier Udey Chand Bakshi) he asked me 'you once applied for retirement. Did you really mean it.'

I said I would not have applied if I had not meant it.

"Why don't you apply again he said." I told him that my previous letter was still with him, it was never returned to me. He could do whatever he liked with it, but I would not like to be ungrateful to His Highness who wanted to keep me more out of graciousness than anything else, I did not like to invite his displeasure by applying again and again. Next day I was informed verbally by Brigadier Udey Chand that His Highness had permitted me to retire, and soon after I received an official letter to that effect, which did not say, when and to whom to hand over. When I asked the Brigade Commander about this he said he had conveyed His Highness command to me as it was, and he knew nothing more about it.

I handed over to my second-in-command Major (later Lieut. Colonel) Puran Singh on the 30th of December 1945, and left. The unit gave me a grand send off.

That was the end of my military career for the time being.

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Chapter XX

MY RECALL TO DUTY

Important political events moved in quick succession after that which, being outside the scope of this book, I hope perhaps to deal with in a separate publication. A passing reference to the events leading to General Scotts removal and my recall and some important events thereafter would not, however, be out of place here.

Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah was behind the bars on account of his "Quit Kashmir" movement. Pandit Nehru was once prevented from visiting and then allowed to visit the State. Mr. Jinnah had once visited and was again expressing his intention of visiting the State. The Indian Sub continent was partitioned into India and Pakistan. Acharya Kriplani, President of the Indian National Congress, and Mahatama Gandhi had visited and met His Highness. Lord Louis Mountbatten, the last Viceroy of India, had also made his historical visit to the State.

Prime Minister R.C. Kak was replaced by Major General Janak Singh before Mr. Mehr Chand Mahajan (later Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of India) arrived and took as Prime Minister. General Scott was found assisting Pt. Ram Chand Kak in flying from the State and was relieved of his appointment. He immediately left for Pakistan via Murree, from where he is said to have gone to South Africa and settle there.

I do not know whether or not it was a coincidence, but soon after General Scott was relieved His Highness sent for me in the palace and commanded me to put up a scheme for reraising the Mountain Batteries. He told Brigadier Rajendra Singh, the new Chief of the Staff, that I was recalled to duty, and necessary command order for my recall to duty on original seniority was issued.

I prepared and submitted the scheme to His Highness. Pakistani Tribesmen were reported to be concentrating on the Pakistan side of the Kashmir—Pakistan Border. Need for the immediate re-raising of the Mountain Batteries was felt and a request for the supply of guns and equipment was made to India. His Highness was probably in touch with Sardar Patel in the matter. I was told to go to Delhi along with Thakur Harnam Singh Pathania and collect the guns and the connected stores needed by us. We carried a letter from His Highness to Sardar Patel with the following list

of equipment and articles needed to meet the coming eventualities :—

LIST OF EQUIPMENT REQUIRED FOR IMMEDIATE OPERATIONAL NEED IN CONNECTION WITH INTERNAL SECURITY.

JAMMU AND KASHMIR STATE.

———

1. Equipment for two 4—Gun (3.7" How) Mtn. Batteries, complete to equipment Table Scales :—
   - i) 8 Guns (3.7 How), Carriages and wheels (preferably Pneumatic), Packsaddlery plus directional and control instruments directors, range finders, binoculars compass, W/T Sets No : 18 and 22 and connected signalling equipment.
   - ii) 4 Bren Guns with AA Mountings.
   - iii) AMMUNITION—6,000 H.E. (Shells)
   - iv) WORKSHOP SETS—TOLLS FITTERS AND ARTIFICERS, COMPLETE TO EQUIPMENT TABLE SCALES.
2. FIGHTER PLANES.
   - i) 2 Fighter Machines (Complete with equipment)
   - ii) Pilots and Personnel to man the above.
   - iii) AMMUNITION—100,000, rds S.A.A. (Ball)
   - iv) Anti-personnel Bombs (to be dropped from the air) 10000.
   - v) Flares—1000.
3. DAKOTA.
   - i) 1 Dakota plane for supply dropping.
   - ii) Personnel to man the above.
4. **VEHICLES FOR MOTORISED CUM PACK BATTERY.**
   - i) Jeeps 4
   - ii) F.A. Tractors or 15 CWT Trucks 6
   - iii) 15 CWT Trucks 4
   - iv) 3 Tonners 10
5. **M/T Sets.**
   - i) 18 or 48 Sets...72. Dry Batteries to fit . 648
   - ii) 38 or 78 Sets...45. Dry Batteries to fit .. 405
6. **DEMOLITION MATERIAL . . . MASONRY WORK**

Sd/- Rajendra Singh,
Brigadier,
Chief of the Staff
J & K State Forces.

The last item in the list was meant for demolition of Kohala Bridge over Jehlum connecting Pakistan with the State, in case of need.

Sardar Patel was indisposed and was in bed. We were taken to his bed room by Miss Mani Behn Patel. The purpose of my going to Delhi was only to get guns and stores according to the list, but having gone to Sardar Patel I felt the tempation of talking to him in my private capacity on other matters. I told Sardar Patel that large concentrations of Pakistanis were taking place at different places on the border if invasion took place they should not leave us alone. The Sardar said we had our State Forces and should be able to stop the raiders. But I said it was not possible for eight Infantry Battalions, dependent for their ammunition supply on Pakistan which had then been stopped, to hold hundreds of miles of border and also to ensure the internal Security. He said "You do your best and stop them for as long as you can." I told him we would not be able to check them for more than a week at the most, and that too if we got a couple of planes for reconnaissance, the guns and the other stores indented for. He said the planes would be of no use to us as we would not have any personnel to man them and the Indian Air Force personnel could not be detailed for the job. I said we would employ necessary personnel ourselves if we get the planes.

Finally he said they could give us nothing as we had not yet acceded to India. "If that was the hitch." I said "we will accede today." "NO NO" the Sardar Said with a smile "The time has not yet come for that." The Sardar gave me a chit and sent me to Sardar Baldev Singh the Defence Minister. I saw him in his office and gave him the chit. Sardar Baldev Singh rang up some one and told him to supply us the guns immediately. I do not know who was at other end, but he appeared to be some British Officer. I could not make out what the other fellow was saying but it could be easily guessed from what the Defence Minister said. When the other fellow said something he said "send these by air" and when the other fellow said something again he said "Make as many trips with it as you like, these must be immedeiately sent." Sardar Baldev Singh then asked me to see a British General whose name I do not remember. When I went to him and sent in my visiting card he did not ask me in but conveyed the message that it would take time to arrange the details and I should see his Deputy after a couple of days. I went to his deputy after two days but did not find him in office. I was waiting for him when an Indian Parsi Full Colonel asked me the purpose of my visit which I told him. He looked at a British Captain who had his table in one corner of his room whispered to me, "come to me after four when he goes away, and I will tell you something." I went again after four and the Full Colonel told me that I would get nothing as the British Supreme Commander,

the C-in-C and others concerned have refused to issue anything to us. I informed the Defence Minister about it, who said he would look into it and said I could return to the State and the guns and the stores would be sent as soon as possible.

We returned to Srinagar where I informed His Highness about this. Thakur Harnam Singh brought a reply from Sardar Patel to His Highness.

The invasion took place as expected on the 24th of October 1947, but the guns and other stores indented for never arrived. What happened after that is a public history. Even a brief description of it would need a separate volume. Armed Pakistani Forces, tribesmen and others crossed the border in large numbers at several places and created disturbances, but their main thrust came from Kohala where the 4th J & K Infantry was looking after the border. The Battaion was composed fifty per cent of Hindus and fifty per cent Mohammadans. The attack came from the flank, held by the Mohammedan companies who themselves joined the invaders. What happened to the others no one knew, until weeks later some of them reached Poonch under Capt (later Major) Labh Singh facing untold hardship en route and bringing with them hundreds of refugees safely.

Colonel Narain Singh commanding the Battalion contacted the Brigade Headquarters in Badamibagh Cantonment by telephone and asked for immediate despatch of reinforcements. When asked about the situation he said "situation is pretty grave. Here they are nearing me now hurry up the reinforcements" and he spoke no more. The State Forces were already strained to the breaking point. They were spread from Askardu, Leh, Gilgit, Srinager Muzaffarabad, Poonch, Kotil, Naoshera, Mirpur to Jammu Samba and Kathua. Apart from the problem of defence of the border there were the problems of internal security and the refugees to deal with. They had no aeroplanes, no artillery, no armoured cars or tanks, no wireless sets. Petrol and ammunition supplies which used to come from Pakistan, had been stopped. No troops were available for reinforcements but some troops were pulled from here and there and a composite company was sent to meet the enemy which was then advancing towards Baramulla. This company came into contact with the invaders somewhere on the road beyond Uri. On spotting the enemy the commander of the company, Captain Prithi Singh, turned his vehicle round and drove back to stop the vehicles following him in order to take up a defensive position. When his own men found this vehicle approaching from the enemy side, they took it to be the enemy and opened fire on it. Captain Prithi Singh was wounded and evacuated to the Military Hospital Srinagar. His Highness enquired about his condition and when told that the Officer was all right and fit even to walk he was braught to the palace where His

Highness personally asked him about the situation which he was not very much in the know of.

His Highness then commanded the Chief of the Army Staff, Brigadier Rajindra Singh, to go to the front and have a look himself. Brigadier Rajindera Singh immediately left and found the company in position near Uri very much pressed by the enemy much superior to them in numbers. He did not like to leave the company in such a situation, specially when they had no commander and stayed on with them. He sent a message to His Highness saying that they would have to withdraw to a position in the rear. But His Highness commanded him not to withdraw but to fight to the last man and the last bullet. It was this command of His Highness and the loyal obedience of it by Brigadier Rajindra Singh and a handful of brave men under him, that saved the valley from utter destruction.

Meanwhile His Highness had asked for the accession of the State to India, had signed the instrument of Accession and had also asked for immediate despatch of the Indian Army to the State to meet the grave situation caused by the invasion. On being persuaded, rather compelled, by Mr. V.P. Menon on the advice of Sardar Patel His Highness moved to Jammu, the winter capital of the State. The troops under Brigadier Rajendra Singh gave a heroic fight to the invaders whose number went on increasing every moment, and were soon overpowered. Brigadier Rajendra Singh was crippled on account of the bullets he received on both his legs. He refused to be evacuated. He was last seen removing his badges of rank and making sure that his pistol was loaded. Most of the men were killed and many injured. Some of the injured and a few dead bodies that could be lifted were brought to the Military Hospital in one or two trucks and were carelessly placed outside the gate. The sight of the dead bodies lying on the road and the haphazard narration of the tale by the injured created a lot of panic among the families and the civil population of the cantonment.

In the town the people were not in the know of what was happening. There was not much of panic, only groups of people were seen here and there discussing the situation. Some panic was, however, caused when the city suddenly plunged into darkness after the Mahura Power House was destroyed by the invaders. Supporters of the Pro-Indian National Conference and the Pro-Pakistan Muslim Conference often clashed and sometimes created a serious situation. A troop of cavalry had to be sent to meet the situation created by their threats and counter threats to each other. Swords were also said to have been brandished. Peace was restored on arrival of the troops. With nothing now in hand to stop the invaders a very serious situation had been created. There were no signs of the arrival of the Indian Army, but it was expected any moment.

The only troops now available were a few medium machine

gunners who had come from different units on a course. These were immediately despatched to the front with a pair of MMGS (Medium Machine Guns) under Capt. Jawala Singh to check the advance of the invaders. They took up position near Rampur and established contact with the Brigade Headquarters, by telephone.

After giving necessary instructions to my younger brothers who were staying with me as to what to do in case the raiders arrived, I went to the Brigade HQ as usual. On my way I saw those dead bodies lying on the road and some families of Gorkha soldiers running in panic. I told them that there was no cause for the panic and that the Indian Army was about to arrive, but they did not believe me. Just then I saw a plane roaring over our heads. I told them that the Indian Army had arrived, other planes also appeared and the families heaved sighs of relief.

Soon after I reached Brigade Headquarters Captain Jawala Singh described on telephone how the invaders in large numbers were adavncing, and expressed his inability to hold them for long. He was told that the Indian Army had arrived and that they would be with him before long. He said it was not time to be funny but for doing something to help them, and then he suddenly said "O yes they have arrived" and left the telephone.

Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, who had since been released on having given an undertaking in writing that he would ever remain loyal, to His Highness and the members of his family had already gone out of the State with family. Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad, his deputy, was giving full co-operation to the Brigade. He had commandeered all the available vehicles and had kept them waiting at the aerodrome. As soon as the first troops landed at the aerodrome they were pushed off to the front to meet our troops already in position.

Although the guns etc. had not arrived, enrolment and re-enrolment of personnel for the batteries was in progress in Jammu according to the proposal made by me. I was summoned by His Highness to Jammu. I went to the aerodrome with a view to flying to Jammu in one of the planes which were bringing troops and were taking back visitors, Lieutenant Colonel Roy, commanding the Battalion, was about to proceed to the front with one more company after leaving one of his companies for the defence of the aerodrome, I told him that the aerodrome was quite safe until other troops arrived and he should take all the companies to the front as the invaders were advancing in large numbers. He said this was the Indian Army now and not the State Forces, so two companies were quite enough. I was still at the aerodrome waiting for a lift when Lt. Colonel Roy telephoned to his Adjutant from the front telling him that he and his forward troops were withdrawing to outskirts of Srinagar town under immense enemy pressure and that he (the Adju-

tant) should immediately despatch more troops to the front. The telephone was not working well and the adjutant frequently asked his Commanding Officer to repeat his order again and lounder. I flew to Jammu where I learnt that Col Roy was unfortunately killed while withdrawing to the outskirts of the town.

The guns had neither arrived nor were likely to arrive for sometime, and the situation had changed on account of arrival of the Indian Army including the Artillery. I was appointed Comptroller of His Highness Household in place of Colonel Narain Singh Rawat promoted Brigadier and appointed commander Jammu Brigade.

The enemy's pressure on the troops defending Srinagar kept on increasing, and while a large part of the invaders dealt with the troops near Shalteng on the outskirts of Srinagar another equally large force advanced from the Western flank towards the aerodrome where some more troop had arrived by then Some very wise commander or staff officer at Delhi, I do not know who, had despatched some armoured cars by road. They arrived not a moment too soon and played havoc with the invaders who fought a desperate battle for the capture of the aerodrome at Badgam. A bloody battle took place in which Major Sharma and many others on our side laid down their lives. The invaders suffered heavily and were chased out of the valley within a few days after a couple of more battles for the recapture of places like Baramulla and Uri. More and more Indian troops arrived, mostly by road.

The Poonch Garrison, although badly threatened and almost cut off, was holding on very well in spite of having run short of ammunition and supplies. Some troops under Brigadier Sen were sent to their help from Srinagar over the Haji Peer. But intimation of despatch of those troops if sent did not reach the commander Poonch Brigade, Brigadier Krishna Singh. As those troops neared Poonch at night a detachment of the Poonch Garrison on their own initiative destroyed a bridge to prevent them from coming, as they took them to be the enemy.

These troops were held up and the enemy who was already on the look out for such situation made a raid on the troops who suffered heavy casualties. Both, the Poonch Garrison and the Indian Army Brigade Commanders accused each other of having let the other down. This and other similar incidents, for which the State Forces were not necessarily responsible, (incidentaly the detachment that destroyed the bridge did not belong to the State Forces) coupled with the prejudice which the Indian Army officers had inherited from their British predecessors against the State Forces gave rise to an unfortunate sense of rivalry between the Indian Army and the State Forces Officers. While the former often openly condemned the latter unheard, the latter in suppressed voices

accused the former of lack of experience on account of quick promotions. This unfortunate sense of rivalry however soon disappeared as the Indian Army and the State Forces worked with, and saw more of, each other, and its place was taken by respect for each other until they finally became one. It was true that Skardu, Mirpur and Kotli fell to the invaders long after the Indian Army had established themselves in the State, but the lack of experience was just a contributory factor to other more important causes such as the difficulty of terrain and non availability of animal transport, similar to those on account of which the famous 4th and 5th Indian Divisions were delayed in their attack on Cheren.

Compared to the operations around Damascus in Syria, and even the most successful operations around Cheren in Eriteria during the World War II when the Army was on the peak of its efficiency, the operations in the Jammu and Kashmir were conducted extremely well. The mistakes or lapses big or small that occurred in the initial stages of the operations were not unusual. These have occured and would occur almost in any operations. Inspite of their handicaps the Indian Army in Kashmir had many achievements to its credit, and had not the "cease fire" come at the time it did in the middle of their offensive, a large part of the Jammu and Kashmir State would not have been under Pakistan occupation as it now is.

Yuvaraj Karan Singhji (later His Highness Maharaja Dr. Karan Singhji) of Jammu and Kashmir proceeded to the United States for medical treatment at the end of 1947. Brigadier N. S. Rawat accompanied him as his Staff Officer on temporary duty. I was appointed Commander Jammu Brigade as a Lieut-Colonel, as under the State rules promotion could not be given against a post only temporarily vacant.

All units of Jammu Brigade at that time were under command of different Indian Army formations for operational purposes in Poonch, Naoshera, Reasi and Jammu areas. Only the Administrative work, which was quite heavy was done through the Head Quarters Jammu Brigade. One Jammu and Kashmir Infantry Battalion and two companies of the Jammu and Kashmir Militia in Reasi area were, however, under the operational control of the Brigade. But these were dispersed in companies well apart facing Budil and some villages around it held by the invadors.

I thought of eliminating this enemy pocket in front of our troops and consulted the General Officer Commanding JAK Div. Major General Atma Singh about it in his office where two other Brigade Commanders were present. They all said that the terrain in that area was difficult and unless pack transport and air support was arranged no operation could be undertaken there. I said I would capture Budil in seven days without any of these and with practically no extra arrangements. They all laughed and the General

said "I give you ten days" but I said I wanted seven days only. I had a talk over the wireless with the Commander of the J & K Infantry Battalion. Lieutenant Colonel Puran Singh Thapa in Reasi Area and told him about the undertaking I had given to the General Officer Commanding. He said I should have visited the Area before giving such an undertaking. I said I knew the area from the map, and there was nothing to prevent me from fulfilling the object. I told him I could not discuss the whole thing over the wireless, but I asked him to send his difficulties in writing which he did. He wanted two hundred and fifty pack animals or five hundred coolies for carrying his stores etc, and some air support without which he said Budil would not be captured for months. I wrote the operation order for the operations myself, sent copies of it to the units in that area and the Divisional Head Quarters, and myself proceeded to the area accompanied by my Brigade Major, Major Ishar Dass (later Lieut. Colonel). The only extra arrangements I made was that I took with me a 3 inch Mortar Platoon of the J & K Infantry Training Battalion and a few strechers from the Hospital for carrying the wounded. The Commanding Officer of the Battalion was with the company furthest away from Budil, so I went straight to the company just in front of Budil to make a frontal attack. The C.O. talked to me again over the wireless and warned that a frontal attack would be fatal and that the attack should be made from our right flank. I disagreed and insisted on a frontal attack, but I told him to advance from the right flank while I would myself direct the frontal attack.

We advanced and captured our first objective, Tuli, about five miles short of Budil, on the first day, but the troops on the right flank failed to make headway on account of what they described as heavy resistance. Col. Puran Singh advised me by a wireless telegraphy (W/T) message that I need not advance on to Budil until he too advanced and secured our right flank. I gave him another day to capture his first objective on the flank and told him that I was going to advance on Budil the next day regardless of whether he was able to advance or not.

We wasted a valuable day at Tuli which gave the enemy, who was on the run, some much need breathing time. No progress was made by our troops on the right flank on the second day of our advance. I decided to go ahead. With only one company, supported by the Medium Machine Gun and the 3" Mortar platoons, we attacked and captured Budil from the front after some fighting in which a number of enemy men were killed including a Havildar Major. Some important enemy documents were catured including a letter from the Commander of the enemy troops in the area addressed to the headman of Budil asking him to look after the troops and to supply them rations from the village.

A Muslim from Budil who met us at Tuli led us over the

difficult country into Budil. The Commander of the company which captured Budil, Captain (later Major) Sansar Singh, was worried as he thought we had been extra bold in having captured Budil with an isolated company with no protection on the flanks. He feared a counter attack, and requested me not to leave Budil until other troops arrived, which I gladly accepted.

We occupied hill tops around Budil after a little fighting, and keeping only one plantoon in hand to meet any counter attack—which in fact never came—waited for the Battalion Commander to come, whom we had informed of the capture.

All the civilian population of Budil, mostly Muslims, had fled to the hills, and most of the troops after burrying their arms and changing into civil dress had also joined them after killing about a dozen Harijans living in the village so that they may not divulge anything to us. When we entered Budil the only inhabitants we found there was a boy who told us that we had arrived just in time as the "Indian Troops" were advancing on the town and the inhabitants had all fled to the hills. When we told him we were Indian Troops he was overjoyed and ran to his house close by and brought an old women with him who bitterly wept as she told us her tale of woe. She and the boy were Sikhs but were forcibly converted to Mahammadans at the time of capture of the town by the enemy. We safely brought back all the horrified inhabitants, men and women, all Muslims, from the hills with their belongings including cattle and resettled them. The only water operated rice husking mill in the village, which was destroyed by the invaders, was put by us into working order.

Next day a deputation consisting of representatives from all villages in the area carrying a large white flag and some bags of rice, tins of ghee, and some goats for us came to me and assured me of their loyalty to the State and to India. I assured them of the security of their lives and property and of equal treatment with other loyal citizens of the State. One of our soldiers pointed to one Suba "Nambardar" among the deputation and stated that he had kiiled about six members of his family during the disturbances. Some other men of the unit belonging to that area also made similar charges against him.

I took the man into custody and, returning the rice, ghee and goats to them with thanks, allowed the other members of the deputation to return. Suba was sent to Jammu and handed over to the civil authorities to be dealt with according to the law.

Next day Colonel Puran Singh Thapa the Commander of the Battalion arrived with the rest of the troops and I with my party returned to Jammu. The following encouraging messages of congratulations were received from General Cariappa General Officer Commanding-in-Chief Western Command, General Shrinagesh,

J & K Corps and General Atma Singh General Officer Commanding JA Div :—

From JA DIV TO JAMMU BDE.

1. 'From GOC for Col. Bhagwan Singh (.) Convey to all ranks my heartiest congratulations on your speeded advance to Budil). Keep it up (.) Ensure that Muslim locals are not maltreated during advance."

2. "Personal from GOC to Bhagwansingh (.) Heartiest congratulations to all ranks who took part in capture of Budil (.) keep it up (.) give the enemy no rest and continue pressing.

From J & K Corps to Jammu Bde :—

"Personal from Army Commander for Lt. Col. Bhagwan Singh Comd. Jammu Bde :—

You will personally ensure that in the forth coming advance to Budil the local Public particularly Muslims are well treated. Your troop behaviour towards them must always be correct considerate and generous. Ack.

"From West Com. to JA BDe.

"Personal from Army commander for Lt. Col. Bhagwansingh. Best congratulaions capture of Budil and OP you are carrying out. Ensure Muslims and Non Muslims treated alike and there is no maltreatment of Muslims. This will be your personal responsibility.

A message with a difference was also received from the Army Headquarters Jammu and Kashmir State Forces whom we used to send copies of our operational messages for information only. They had taken no notice of our successful operations as others had, but had objected as other had not, to my having given the name of the Mohammedan who led us into Budil, in the message.

When I met General Atma Singh our Division Commander General Yadunath Singh was also there. General Atma Singh warmly congratulated me and told me that he already thought very high of me, but my action in Budil had convinced him that I was an outstanding Commander. He said he had recommended me to the Army Headquarters Jammu and Kashmir State Forces for promotion to a Brigadier, and advised me to make sure that nobody sits on the recommendation. I later came to know that the recommendation was filed in the Army Headquarters Jammu and Kashmir State Forces under the signatures of a Junior Staff officer.

On return of Brigadier N.S. Rawat from America I was put in command of my old unit, the 1st J & K Infantry. After the cease fire in the Jammu and Kashmir I again retired from service on the 10th of November 1950 after full three years of my re-employment and my Military career ended for good.

All my three sons and the only son-in-law have selected Army as their Career. Major Braham Singh the eldest son was Commissioned in 1953 and was posted to the Punjab Regiment but was later transfered to the Jammu and Kashmir Rifle Regiment. He has been on active service in Jammu and Kashmir and in the North Eastern Frontier Agency (NEFA). The second Captain Prabhu Singh was Commissioned in 1962 and is serving in the Rajputana Rifle Regiment He has been awarded the Vir Chakra for gallantry in the Field, during the recent Indo-Pak Conflict in the Khemkaran sector. The third Captain Keshav Singh was Commissioned in 1964 and is serving in the Sikh Regiment. He played, a gallant part during the recent Indo-Pak conflict in the Chhamb Deva and Poonch sectors of the Jammu and Kashmir State and was mentioned in Despatches in the Chhamb Deva sector it fell to his units lot to recapture the positions where his youngest uncle Major Balram Singh Jamwal had heroically laid down his life, for the sacred defence of his motherland, only fortyeight hours earlier, after fighting the enemy for five days. The son-in-law Lieutenant Vasudev Singh Pathania was Commissioned in 1964 and is serving as an instructor at the Army Education Corps (AEC) Training College at Pachmarhi. My little grand son Shivnandan Singh, hardly four years old listens to no advice against joining the Army. He would always rush to the top of our house to shoot the pakistani Planes with his toy gun during the Pakistani Air raids over Jammu. The only snag he said was that he had no uniform. It is thus a matter of deep satisfaction to me that the family martial tradition is being maintained. These boys will not have to face many of the problems that I encountered during my career. There are now no British officer problems nor any tension between the Indian Army and the State Forces. There is now one unified Indian Army, dedicated to the task of maintaining our hard won freedom which at the moment is threatened by aggressive neighbours from two directions. The essential qualities of courage and commonsense, however, remain as essential as ever and I can only hope that the younger generation of Indian Army Officers are imbued with them in full measure.

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The Author and his son Captain Prabhu Singh Vr.C. with President Dr. Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan

COMMENDATORY MESSAGES

1. From General Sir Claude Auchinleck, Commander-in-Chief in India :—

"On behalf of the Government of India, it gives me great pleasure to thank you for the services which you have rendered to the Crown and to India, and for the contribution which you have made for winning the war. Now that you are returning to your State I wish you happiness and prosperity for the future.

Sd/- C. Auchinleck,
General,
Commander-in-Chief in India.

Similar letters were received by many other officers.

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From Captain Amar Nath second-in command Ist J & K Mtn. Bty. on withdrawal of the Senior S.S.O. dated nil.

My dear Major Sahib,

Heartiest Congratulations for achieving a success for which an ordinary man can't hope even. Splended it is not an ordinary success but an unexpected record, which no State Officer from the I.S F. could dare even to achieve so far.

It is a brilliant record, which you, through your good, honest and continuous efforts at the risk of your honour, achieved so successfully. You have won an honour, which is not only your personal glory but is a credit for all the Indian State Forces. It is a brilliant example for all the State Officers of I.S.F. to maintain their self respect and the honour of their State.

It is a glorious RECORD which should be recorded on the Battery history book in golden letters. It is one of the most brilliant successes which a man can achieve in his life. It is a praiseworthy act which deserves praises and admiration from the subordinates and appreciations from the higher authorities.

We are really proud to have you as our Commanding Officer especially under present circumstances. It will give me pleasure beyond limits if the authorities may be convinced that the replace-

ments is not necessary and we can do our job without any external special supervision.

How happy we will be and how enthusiastically and honestly we will carry out duties and how efficiently and accurately we will put our shells on the enemy under all circumstances and how full of spirits and with extreme loyalty, we will be ever ready to sacrifice our lives for the common cause if the authorities trust us, our efficiency, our training, our common sense, our loyalty, our sense of discharging our duties and our knowledge to deal with administration and discipline, and don't place thorny supervision for 24 hours on our heads. How fortunate we will be if C.R.A. is convinced that we are fit and efficient to carry out our respective jobs under all circumstances and there is no necessity of placing any SSO with this Battery. An Officer which may hardly be spared from other duties to act as S.S.O. with this Battery will be wasting his precious time, in which he may be employed for some other important and useful job especially under present circumstances when the war is on. Detailing an Officer as S.S.O., with this Battery will serve no more useful purpose than to send him on furlough and at the present time of emergency especially when they are already short of Officer it is not in the interest of the Govt. to send Officer on long furlough. The supervision and control of authorities of proper channel is sufficient for us too like other units. God may convince C.R.A. that we are in no way less in knowledge and efficiency than an average I.A. Officer who is left alone to perform his duty.

Even Capt. Oliver who is supervising me, if asked and if he is ready to say by God, honestly and on his honour, will admit that he is doing nothing useful to the Government, but wasting his time and Government money as he has got nothing to do here and everything is being done by us according to the instructions and expectations of our superior authorities without any criticism.

Yesterday we again went to Zuhani to fix our OP under cover of Infantry patrol. On the way back our party saw one enemy patrol of about 25 men on foot on the other side of the river. They fired at them (enemy) a few rounds at about 800 and they fled away. Nothing fresh to pen. Everything else is O.K.

Yours sincerely,

Sd/-A.N. Sharma.

From Lt. Col J.W. Cooper Commanding 21st Mountain Regiment Kohat N.W.F.P. Former Military Adviser Artillery I.S.F dated 27 April 1941.

"I was more than pleased to have your letter of 6th April with the good news it contained. The reputation of the Battery has travelled back to India as the BRA Northern Command told

me last night that he had heard from a friend of his Commanding the 5th Marattas that the Ist J&K Mtn Bty. had always provided good support at the time required.

My best congratulations to you and to the Battery in which my wife joins, she was delighted to hear your good news.

I am no longer Military Adviser but I will write to General Gwatkin to let him know what you have written and what I have heard from the Brigadier R.A. in case he has not heard already.

Two weeks ago I had sudden orders to take over command of this Mountain Regt. and although Kohat is hardly the centre of a War area I find there is a great deal to do here all the same.

I wonder what the future holds in store for you. I hope at any rate that you are having a respite at present so that you will be rested and replenished.

My very best wishes to you all. I shall be delighted to hear from you again when you have time to write.

Translation of a letter from Brigadier Rahmatullah Khan Commander Kashmir Brigade Badami Bagh Cantt. Srinagar dated 12 Jan. 1942.

"Please accept my heartiest congratulations on the grant of Jagir you deserve it in all respects. It is not only you but the whole of the Kasmir Army that has been honoured. I read it in the Gazette only yesterday but Major Pritam Singh Governor Kashmir told me that he knew it for about a month, so you are getting my congratulations a bit late but they are second to none in sincerity, warmth and heartfelt pleasure.

My regards to Capt. Amar Nath and Ahsan Ali, and Lt. Madan Lal and convey my heartfelt congratulations to Lt. Madan Lal for an award of Military Cross.

I hope all officers and many rank and file will be honoured by such awards before they return to the State.

We had recently a heavy snowfall here and the earth is white till now.

Order of the day by Major General L.M. Heath C.B., C.I.E., D.S.O, M.C., Commander, 5th Indian Division.

10th April, 1941.

On relinquishing command of the 5th Indian Division I desire to place on record my high appreciation of the soldierly qualities displayed by my troops and by those who have supported them and maintained them.

Since the offensive commenced in mid January the Division has been victorious in every action that has been fought.

The first phase concluded with the occupation of BARENTU AND WAHNI, the fighting for which was hard.

The second phase opend on the 15th March, after a period of stern training for the even more formidable tasks which lay ahead. It was in this training period that the foundation for success was laid.

None but seasoned, fit and well disciplined troops magnificently led, could have hoped to achieve success.

The capture of DOLOGORODOC position and the Fort itself and the stubborn and successful resistance, over a period of ten days, to all attempts to retake it must for all time rank high in Military annals. Seldom can troops have been called upon to show greater tenacity and endurance; exposed to intense and accurate fire of every description, the troops themselves, assisted by the Cypriot Mule Corps, carried many tons of ammunition, water and supplies up the preciptous fire-swept slopes. For ten days the enemy battered himself in his abortive, though most determined, counter-attacks to the retake position. During this stern period, the way was well prepared for exploitation of our gain, and that exploitation was carried out so courageously and with such dash and determination that the enemy army defending CHEREN was shattered.

For the defence of the capital of Eritrea he was compelled to bring forward all his available reserves. Though the defenders were throughout favoured by terrain, they failed to withstand our successive and vigorous onslaughts. Within a space of fifteen days the Italian Eritrean Army which, for several weeks had fought so stubbornly, was overwhelmed and ASMARA was entered on the 1st April, 1941. Eight days later, troops of the Division in co-operation with troops of the 4th Indian Division, the Sudan Defence Force and the French Foreign Legion captured the formidable defences of MASSAWA. In achieving this success, the Royal Tank Regiment rendered most conspicuous service.

The Infantry has borne the brunt of the fighting and has sustained the majority of the casualties. The Infantrymen, however, will be the first to praise the unstinted and skilful support afforded by the other arms of the service : all have had to work at top pressure and their efforts have been tireless : Gunners, Signals, Transport, Supply, Ordnance, Medical and the Clerical establishment, all have displayed superlative devotion to duty.

In addition, special tribute must firstly be paid to the Sapper and Miner Companies who worked with almost superhuman energy, quite undaunted by shot or shell, in their task of clearing the several demolitions encountered during our advances, and secondly to the Mobile Troops who co-operated : the Sudan Defence Force Motor Machine Gun Companies and Light Artillery, and the Central India Horse who together enabled success to be confirmed.

Without the gallant and ever generous co-operation of the Royal Air Force not only could victory not have been achieved but the operations could not have been undertaken : to the R.A.F. all will desire to join me in offering extreme appreciation and gratitude.

For the services which have been rendered, praise from the highest quarters has been received and that these tributes be not forgotten they are herein placed on record.

In bidding you farewell, I hereby desire to thank each individual soldier and airmen for the part he has played in contributing to the victories of the Division under my command in Eritrea. May your victorious career continue.

S/d L.M. HEATH
Major-General, Commander.
5th Indian Division.

Copy to No. SF 7171 MAJOR BHAGWAN SINGH., Commanding 1st Jammu & Kashmir Mtn. Battery

From the Prime Minister of U.K.

"Defence Committee desire me to convey to you their cordial congratulations on the success at **Cheren** and request that you will transmit their thanks to General **Platt** and the forces under his command for the continued rapid execution of their memorable campaign."

From His Excellency The Commander-in-Chief in India.

"May I congratulate you on behalf of Army in India on yet another splendid success gained in face of great odds I will be grateful if you will convey my congratulations to the troops from India who have done so much to bring about this victory. India is very proud of them. I should like also to express my sympathy with those who have been wounded and to wish them speedy recovery."

From the General Officer Commanding in Chief Middle East.

"Now that I have seen for myself the positions at KEREN which you have been attacking, I admire all the more highly the skill and courage which has enabled you to storm such inaccessible heights, held by an enemy superior in numbers and fighting with desperate energy. I appreciate also the great work which has been accomplished by the administrative services, carrying parties and mule drivers in getting away the wounded and bringing up ammunitions and supplies.

I feel confident that your efforts will soon be crowned by the capture not only of KEREN but all ERITREA, thus bringing to a

triumphant conclusion a campaign which will always be remarkable for the difficulties that can be overcome by trained and resolute troops."

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From the General Officer Commanding Troops in the Suddan :

"Best Congratulations to Comd. and all troops under 5th Indian Division for fine advance from Cheren to Asmara."

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Some extracts from the "Jammu & Kashmir Information April 1944".

"On his return to India shortly after the capture of Asmara Lt-General Heath, Commander of the Division with which the Battery served, in a broadcast from Delhi, described the services of the Battery at the battle of Keren and the advance on Asmara as invaluable".

"The Battery first saw active service in the Sudan, on the eastern frontiers of Abyssinia, helping to repel the Italian advance into the Sudan and then to chase the enemy across the frontier into Abyssinia. Later it moved east and took part in the conquest of Eritrea particularly distinguishing itself in the battle of Cheren and the capture of Asmara."

"On the conclusion of these campaigns, the Battery was sent to Palestine where it took part in the invasion of Syria and again distinguished itself in the battle of Damascus maintaining its past glorious traditions. "The Commander of the Division with which the Battery served praised the standard of efficiency of the battery under skilled command of Lt. Col. Bhagwansingh, and made the following remark about him :—

"You have filled yourself with glory."

His Highness sent the following message to Lt. Col. Bhagwan Singh in appreciation of his heroic deeds :—

"Your Divisional Commander, also General Auchinleck and the Commander-in-Chief in India have expressed their appreciation of the work of yourself your officers and men in Damascus and remarked that you all acquitted yourselves with great distinction. I am most proud of you all and greatly value the fine example you have set to your brother officers and men of all our other units in the field. Well done. My best wishes for your further success in the future."

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